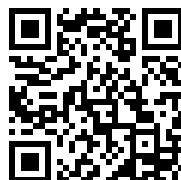

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The FOOL *of* GOD



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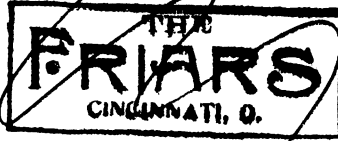
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“This heart of mine will I lay into your heart!”

THE FOOL OF GOD

A HISTORICAL NOVEL

BY
ANDREW F. KLARMANN, A.M.

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS OF GAN-GAR," "NIZRA"
"LIFE IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH," ETC.

(1866-1931)



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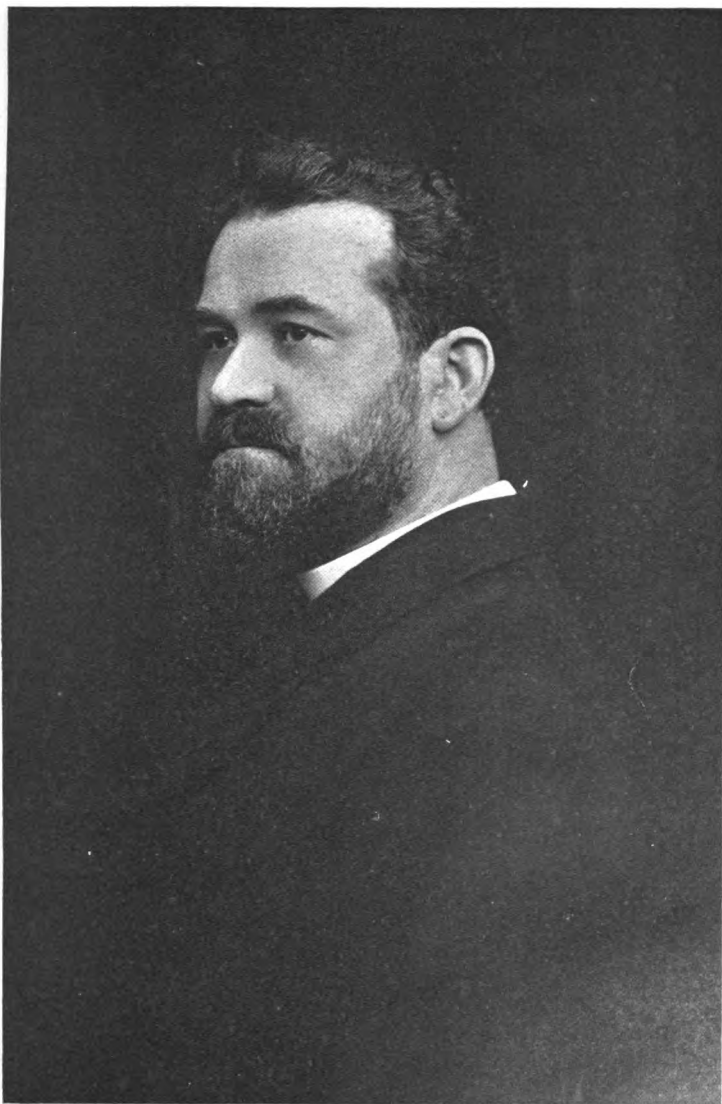
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Andrew Klannan.



The Fool of God

Chapter First

FALLEN AMONG ROBBERS



BLOODY battle had been fought. The signs, remnants, and results of it were in evidence everywhere. The black, blood-soaked lumps of sand scraped and kicked up by the feet of camels and dromedaries frenzied with the tumult of the fight, broken shafts of lances, the crude hilt of a sword, shreds of garments, quilted head-coverings, and several dead bodies stretched out in pools of blood, made up the picture of one of the ordinary occurrences of travel through the desert of Shur in those olden days.

It was very late in the day. The gray veils of evening were floating like shadows in the amber air, lone and slow, as if afraid to descend upon the gruesome scene, the finger-mark of hatred between brethren imprinted on the dead sand.

Far out towards the north was seen a troop of camel riders in precipitate flight. They were vanishing so fast that they grew darker and smaller with the passing moments, and that in a few minutes nothing of their forms could be distinguished save the few whitish

dots of their flying mantles scattered here and there among the quickly moving brownish mass formed by their beasts in silhouette against the somber desert sky.

They had long left the road of the caravans. Their course was slowly declining in a northwesterly direction, towards the Walls of the Princes of the North, the Gate of Egypt from Asia. But between their intention and their goal lay the Nahal Musri,¹ the watery boundary line of Egypt towards the East, a torrent at times of a most violent and uncompromising temper and disposition.

In a shallow depression of the monotonous ground hard by the road of the caravans, and only a stone's throw from the scene of the recent fray, several dozen camels were moving about, nervous, with the excitement of the battle and the satisfaction of their success plainly visible in their exaggerated and silent stride and the frisky tossing of their bald heads. They were nosing each other with bubbling good-humor, and rubbing their sides against each other, and still were constantly stamping about without rest and their usual composure.

Their riders were sitting on the ground at one end of the hollow, busy with repairing and cleaning their weapons. Here one was diligently scouring a mischievously crooked steel blade, there, another was mending the broken pole of citron wood which had served him as a javelin, and had snapped in two at the outset, and still another was energetically whetting the head of a lance which had been nicked and dulled by the heavy blows of the swords of their adversaries. But Rachor, their leader, a man of the build of the wild

¹ Wady el Arish.

ass, arising after he had cleaned his cudgel that seemed the emblem of his strength and prowess, grasped the mighty instrument of battle with both hands, and weighing it critically for a test of its trustiness, raised it and whirled it about his head, uttering a triumphant challenge: "We are ready again for a pass with our foe!" And Phares, a much younger man, and on terms of intimacy with Rachor, replied joyfully: "No fear of a lack of such diversion so long as the Midianites can stretch a bow and stride a beast!"

At hearing the voice of the leader, a large camel, carrying a canopied and covered wicker basket on its back, stamped through the throng of the other beasts, forcing them aside right and left, and, reaching the spot where Rachor and Phares were exchanging opinions, put its soft mouth with a smack into Rachor's face. "Merob," he protested vehemently, "down on your knees, you unmannered beast!" And he planted a vigorous slap on the busy lips of Merob with the palm of his hand. The camel instantly knelt down and heavily laid its head on the shoulder of one of the disinterested and unsuspecting members of the troop.

As Merob went down, Rachor stooped over the basket, turned aside the canopy, and raised the wicker cover.

"Are they gone?" a small frightened voice piped up from the depths of the basket.

"Yes, my pet," Rachor responded tenderly; "they are gone so far that they could not find their way back in a week. And in a week we expect to be safe within the walls of Mizraim¹ and to give our darling a holiday or two."

Meanwhile the curly head of a ten-year-old girl had

¹ Egypt.

appeared above the rim of the curious carriage. Her face brightened slowly from the look of fear into a smile of gratitude and pleasure; then a pair of white arms were pushed out from the wide sleeves of a linen tunic and were twined about Rachor's neck with a hearty embrace, and the small cherry lips sought Rachor's shaggy cheek. "Thank you, thank you, Father Rachor," the child stammered; "I would at all events rather go into Egypt and join the priests than fall into the hands of the godless Midianites."

The child's caress and speech produced a complete fascination on the gray-headed chief; a fascination such as plainly lacked the touch of familiarity, of parental affection, just as the child's reverent address of "Father" Rachor lacked the intimacy of filial trust, but rather bore the distinct odor of reserve; but a fascination that visibly tended towards ecstasy. "Father" Rachor was surely not the father of this child, and this child appealed to a higher sense of love in him than is animated by the sacred instinct of earthly parenthood.

When the girl lightly expressed her preference, or, rather, resignation, of joining the priests, Rachor vainly struggled to suppress a smile of diffidence. His eyes ran up and down the lithe little figure in his hands with mute, and yet not doubtful admiration. He must have knowledge of the destiny of the child from some certain, unquestionable source, of which he might know the existence without being sure of its nature; as one may admire the sparkling fire of the diamond without understanding its cause.

Rachor eyed the girl with wrapt attention. Her delicate face was yet wearing the slight frown of her protest against company with the wicked Midianites;

but he seemed oblivious of the embarrassment so protracted an inspection was bound to cause a helpless mite who, despite this affectionate scrutiny, remained recollected, and, reading his interest in his face, appeared to unite her own speculation with his, looking backward far beyond their present concerns and condition. "May the blessing of your fathers rest upon your head forever," at last murmured Rachor, and with one hand parting her tunic a little, directly beneath her throat, reverently imprinted a kiss upon a mark visible on her breast, of the shape of a small, three-armed cross, and of the color of the hyacinth. But at that moment there sounded a shout of alarm from one of the two guards who had been posted at the entrance of the hollow on the top of two horns of the riven rock which surrounded the place of their retreat.

The depression in which they were camping was probably an old, dried-up salt pool, unevenly filled with the fine sand and dust which the winds of the desert had for many years blown into it, and was bordered by a ring of crumbling rock like the brim of a wine goblet battered from strenuous service of many years. Between the rifts and cracks where a little moisture might remain from a straying cloud of a capricious winter, scanty tufts of wiry grass, several hard-and-dry thorn bushes, and giant thistles as hardy and dry as the thorns had made their home. Their presence did not enhance the appearance of hospitality. Beneath them may be lurking the poisonous toad, lizards of shape and humor ugly, and other disgusting vermin. They may even conceal a creature more hostile to man than the weird creeping dwellers of darkness — a hostile brother-man.

At the shout from the post, both guards leaped to the bottom of the hole; the camp was in an uproar; every man was on his feet, and every beast pointed its nose inquisitively into the air. Even Merob rose to its full height, and so quickly that Rachor had either to release the girl or to obtain a better hold, and mount the self-willed beast. He chose to let the child ascend alone, and turned and took up his uncouth club, ready for defense or attack.

Merob, with its precious burden, excitedly stamped away and was lost among the other excited animals. The men, however, in a thickly massed and pressing troop, ran after the guards, who led the way towards the opposite end of the camp, over many hillocks of loose sand and through many pits and ditches. From the bed of the old pool the wide plain of the desert was not visible, and anything might happen there without the knowledge of those ensconced beneath the rocky border.

Ignorance of the nature of approaching ills and dangers always adds the weight of uncertainty to anxiety and dread. The guards had not uttered another intelligible word after sounding the alarm, and Rachor and his other men sprang after them from impulse rather than from judgment. But the guards had been stationed for the purpose of keeping watch over their brethren and of signaling any signs of danger to their rest and peace; hence there must be danger in the air.

And danger there was. Only it was present in two forms, one of which was in the open to attract attention and to lure watchfulness from its station on the scene, whereas the other lay hidden to accomplish their common design of wickedness. As the guards, who

had kept in the lead, leaped upon the rim of the hollow, followed by their comrades leaping after them or creeping and squeezing through the rifts and rents of the rock like so many eager hounds, a lone rider, mounted on a Midianite dromedary, was seen hurrying away at top speed towards the southeast. He was without doubt a Midianite, a member of the band that was routed not an hour before. Why should he have stayed behind? And if he had succeeded in secreting himself in their own camp, might not another one, or more, of these pests of the desert have remained? And would they not seek to retrieve the quarry from which the band, in solidarity, had been driven away?

These thoughts flashed through Rachor's mind the instant that he regained his judgment; but it was an instant too late. He cried after his companions, who were lustily engaged in the chase, to stop and return; but they pressed on, not even heeding their plain unfitness for a race afoot after a rider of the fleetest footed beast on earth. Rachor returned to the camp by leaps and bounds, like a lioness in rage running to the defense of its endangered cubs.

The Midianites had as by chance associated themselves to the caravan of Rachor and his Hebrew companions on the road. They had exhibited none of their characteristic national traits of brutal arrogance and passionate thievishness. On the contrary, they had shown themselves as unselfishly hospitable and as frankly sociable as if they, at least, of their whole tribe, had never known of the deep-rooted envy and hatred which the sons of Midian¹ bore the sons of Isaak. But all their show of good will did not dispel the mistrust of the Hebrews. "We have honey on our hands,"

¹ Midian, or Madian: one of the sons of Abraham.

Phares was wont to remark to one or another of his more impressionable companions, when they voiced their astonishment at the exceptional good grace of their ill-famed neighbors; "we have honey on our hands, and therefore the bears of Edom¹ are so assiduously following in our wake."

"Yea, we have honey on our hands!" Rachor now ejaculated reminiscently to himself, as he was bounding over the mounds in the bed of the hollow straightway towards Merob. "Today," he continued querulously, "today they tried to plunder the hive, and we had to crack the skulls of some of them to wean the bandits of their thievish lusts. Merob, down on thy belly!"

Merob reluctantly went down with an evident desire of turning over on its side, away from Rachor, to prevent an immediate inspection of the basket. But Rachor tore away the canopy, and while fumbling with the lid of the basket, plaintively and anxiously called the girl's name: "Aseneth, are you unhurt? Aseneth, are you here?"—But Aseneth was gone.

Rachor swayed and reeled, and would have dropped to the ground had he not held himself up by grasping the edge of the rack to which Aseneth's litter was strapped. For some time he was unable to give vent to his feelings otherwise than by his heavy and hissing breathing, which was relieved in due time by a broken succession of howls and screeches as fierce and terrible as those of a trapped wolf. And then, seized with a fit of rage, he fell to belaboring the harmless Merob with his cudgel. But the dumb beast was little minded to suffer the unreasoning wrath of its master. It leaped to its feet, with all its awkwardness and bulk,

¹ The Edomites (Idumites), Ismaelites, and Midianites were much of one kind.

and kicked out with its hind feet together, saucily and deliberately; and thus disposing of its tormentor with commendable decision and determination, it scampered away with both its apology of a tail and its caricature of a head raised high in the air.

The kick of the camel was better suited to bring Rachor back to his senses than any amount of argument and speculation. It was not a comfortably applied remedy, he thought in the first moment of his grim self-inspection; yet he did not fail to respond to an inspiration of gratitude towards the lusty and trusty beast. He realized that he had well deserved the lesson.

But Merob also presently came back towards him, somewhat diffidently and cautiously at first, and moved around him in a circle several times. Rachor was thoroughly familiar with the fine scent no less than with the cunning of the camel, and, in particular, with these well-fostered traits of old Merob, which had often before been a friend and companion to him on his journeyings through the deserts of Shur and Sin. He knew that Merob was disquieted about something more important than the expectation of a compliment in kind in return for the wholesome kick. Accordingly Rachor arose out of the sand, shook himself like a hen arising from a dust bath, and laid a hand on Merob's nose. The beast jerked the hand aside and pushed Rachor forward with its head, out of the camp. There Rachor espied another dromedary rider far away towards the northwest, in the direction opposite that of the Midianite whom his companions were following.

This newly discovered rider must be the kidnaper, for the other had been seen the moment he came out of hiding and made good an ostensible escape,

when the old leader had still been engaged with his joy over the safety of the child. It was only when Rachor also had taken the bait and had blindly gone in pursuit of the first marauder, that the other had had the field to himself. The escape of the first was a pre-arranged feint. It had cleared the way for the other to snatch Aseneth from her guardians. And now both the Midianites were equally far out of reach, the one fleeing northwards with Aseneth, to join his band probably at some designated spot on the other side of the Nahal Musri, and the other making a detour towards the southeast, probably in order to take the news of the successful *coup* to some other horde of bandits, who might be holding themselves ready to descend upon the outwitted Hebrews within a day or two, and to prevent them from reaching the northern toll station in time to denounce the outrage to the authorities and to despoil the robbers of the profit of their capture.

These flying bands of Midianites were the terror of the desert. They were intimately acquainted with all its moods, and knew every cistern, pool, and oasis on the wide, dead waste. The several bands were wise enough to operate in concert, so that one band or another, engaged in an expedition of mischief, would be sure to be supported by another band, which would supply them with water and provisions. The Hebrews were as nearly powerless to cope with them, once they were marked as enemies, as a family of hares may be, within the foraging district of a family of hungry foxes.

All these considerations sprang up in Rachor's brain as quickly and as clearly as spray from the splurge of a stone pitched into a rapid river. And the thought both of his helplessness and of his being tricked by the

detested haters of his race was little calculated to soothe the ferocious pride of a Hebrew of his pretensions. He was the captain of the servants of Jacob who were almost exclusively employed on dangerous missions, where a trusty blade was as valuable as a cool head. He was, moreover, a pure-blooded descendant of the Chaldeans who had emigrated from Ur in the retinue of Abraham, the father of the Hebrews. Hence, although not in fact a Hebrew by blood, yet he was proud of the close national relationship of the fathers of Abraham and his own.

Phares boasted the same enviable distinction. The rest of Rachor's band were not of unmixed blood, some of them owing their origin to Chanaanites, either on the fathers' or the mothers' side, and others even hailing from the country of Moab or from the hills of Galaad; and one or two had a dash of the noble Hittite blood in their veins. But one and all they were proud to serve the distinguished shepherd king Jacob, or Israel, who was reported to hold communion with High Heaven even as once did Melchisedech, the mysterious old king of Salem; and before all those who did not know them more closely, they posed as true Hebrews.

Hence Rachor most keenly felt the humiliation of his defeat at the hands of the Midianites. He was incapable of planning and scheming in his present mood. And yet planning and scheming was the only recourse to be had against the powerful tribe of their enemies under existing circumstances. Could the Hebrews by any unexpected stroke of good luck succeed in reaching the Northern Wall, either before the kidnapers themselves made their entrance — in state, of course, as befitted the bearers of so precious a treasure as an

untainted Asiatic Beauty — or at least before the necessary legal explanations of their intentions were made, there would be no doubt that the honest and upright P'tehebra, the governor of the North and the official guard of the Sethroitic nome, could be prevailed upon to seize the girl and put her in detention until her cause could be laid before the court of the pharaoh.

But this thought of legal proceedings before a bench (or rather, a "Gate," as it was called in Egypt) of fastidious judges, who availed themselves of every opportunity of filling the royal harem with the much sought dainty beauties of Asia, brought new anxieties to Rachor's perplexed mind. He was accredited as the agent of Jacob in the matter of transferring Aseneth from Chanaan to Anu.¹ In his testimonial letters to P'hotepra the highpriest, to whom Aseneth was to be delivered as to a scion of the house with whom Abraham during his sojourn in Egypt had found hospitality, were minutely described the reasons of his mission and his authority to act in the name of Jacob. These indispensable credentials he had secreted in a pocket within the wicker basket. This pocket was sealed. He had inspected the seal twice every day since their departure from home: in the morning when they pitched their tents to rest, and in the evening when they pulled up their stakes. The only member of the party who was privy to the secret, was Phares. The rest knew only of the purpose of their journey but were ignorant of the presence of the precious document. It was probable, therefore, that the thief had overlooked the receptacle in the depth of the basket, and thus had missed taking along with him the key to the success of their scheme. And Rachor slowly turned and

¹ Heliopolis; also, On.

climbed up, without subjecting Merob to the trouble of kneeling, and literally dived into Aseneth's vacated abode. But with a terrified roar, like that of a bull that had unwittingly pushed his mouth into a nest of hornets, he recoiled, and limp and lifeless slid down the side of the pawing beast into the sand and fell over in a dead swoon. The seal was broken, and the papers were stolen.

After more than an hour's animated but profitless chase, Phares returned to camp with the rest of his troop of overheated and exhausted pursuers. It did not take long for them to notice not only the absence of Rachor, but also the loss of their distinguished ward, together with the letter, the importance of which Phares indicated with a few terse terms of profanity to his astonished companions. However, they soon found Rachor where he had fallen down, with the faithful Merob keeping watch over him. But when Rachor was revived, he could not but confirm their suspicions. With dispirited voice he uttered an imprecation on the heads of the Midianites, and then turned away his face from Phares and kept on staring into the hazy distance in the northwest until well past midnight, without giving a sign of interest in their plight.

All the others one by one sat down in a circle behind Rachor, so as to turn their backs to one another, and having at first set up a concert of crying and howling, at last lapsed into silence, which they gradually improved by falling over one another in sleep. Phares and Rachor alone remained awake under the deep purple canopy of the sky of night over the silent and solemn desert.



Chapter Second

LOOKING BACK



THE desire for the companionship and possession of the dainty daughters of Sem was a besetting passion with all Egyptians of means and position. The Egyptian women, although far famed for their sweetness of disposition and grace of bodily form, still lacked the one necessary feature of perfect beauty — a perfect type of face. Also the tinge of copper in the color of their skin was considered to be derogatory to the full glory of their presence; for their loyal lords prided themselves on a well-cultivated taste for the beautiful. The picture, therefore, of the perfect Egyptian beauty was that of a woman of refinement, of modest bearing, of a sunny disposition, of ingrained domesticity, of lithe and graceful form; in short, of a truly lovable creature. But whatever of her bodily grace was not draped in silk-like, scented byssus, presented itself under the uninviting cover of a coppery skin; and, to the irredeemable injury of the very top of woman's beauty, there sat, shrinking and abashed, a little upturned nose in her face. She was a queen without a scepter, a cherub without a crown, a vision with a gap.

Her Asiatic sister of similar social position was more fortunate with garnering the gifts of the envious gods.

She lacked many, if not all, of the winning graces of heart with which the Egyptian woman was so lavishly endowed. For she was not inclined to wear her natural refinement as an adornment before the eyes of her selfish lord; it might have wrongly impressed him as bidding for his favor. She spurned retirement, the angel guardian of womanly modesty, because she demanded her full portion of the enjoyments of the sterner sex. The sunniness of her disposition was habitually veiled with the mist of distrust—and not without reason. Her domestic instincts were weakened in proportion to her love for appearing in public and for participating in the exciting game and gossip of the market-place.

So far the description of the Oriental woman fitted the wives of the public officials and the courtiers of Babylon and Assyria and of the Southerners of the two Chaldees. But the women who actually were, or were destined to become, the wives of men of the so-called middle and lower classes, from sheer force of circumstances, if not for the reason of greater liberty of developing the womanly instincts, could be just as refined, as modest, as cheerful, and as proud of their own hearth as the most favored of the women of Egypt, or of anywhere else in the wide world.

But they enjoyed in common with the favorites of fortune of their tribe the perfection of the model of human face and figure. And what was true of the women of the southeastern branch of the great Semitic family was true in larger measure of the tribe of the Hebrews who had migrated into Chanaan, and, in the highest degree, of the small remnant of the ancient powerful and populous tribe of the Hittites. With the Hittite maiden, the tribute of reverence paid her by her

brothers, the jealous watchfulness of a pure mother, the fragrance of the intimacy of the family circle, the vigorous atmosphere of domestic diligence, and the joy of security born of the chasteness of many generations of the past conspired to enhance her natural graces of both body and mind. And if the fostering of the spirit of religious piety is apt to add charm to nature, and luster to endowment, the Hebrew maiden was placed in a position of especial advantage, so that her comparatively higher aspirations and greater remoteness from the odor of the gross earth lent vigor and permanence to her virtue, and solidity and genuineness to her bodily graces.

It was for such reasons as these that the Egyptians, both king and courtiers, were ready to set aside all scruples in acquiring for their fireside a mistress, or for their carriage of state a companion, from among the fine daughters of Heber or of Heth. But it was not for the reason of gratifying this proclivity of the Egyptians that Aseneth was borne away from her home by her kinsmen. The Midianites, however, had no other end in view but to realize a large profit out of the sale of the captured girl for just such reason.

Aseneth was the daughter of Dinah, a daughter of Lia. Her father was Sicheu, the son of Hemor, a Hevite prince, a man of noble parts of mind and body. Dinah, contrary to the customs and laws of her people, had aspired to be Sicheu's wife. The sons of Jacob, her own uncles, most grievously resented this departure of the girl, one of the most beautiful of the tribe, from the jealously guarded rules of the imperious Hebrew family, and they took revenge on the luckless Hevite and his kin such as is unequaled

in the annals of history for exquisite brutality. Dinah, together with her young daughter Aseneth, was returned to Jacob's tents. But since the aversion of the sons of Jacob was not mitigated with the passing years, and there was constant danger to the life of the innocent offspring of the Hevite, Jacob at last resolved to put the child beyond the reach of harm by sending her to Egypt in charge of the sturdy and loyal Rachor and Phares and their band of doughty swordsmen. She was to be raised in the house of P'hotepra, the highpriest of the great temple of Anu, and the head of its celebrated temple school, and a close friend of the pharaoh. And Jacob prayed and trusted that Heaven would make a kindly disposition of the unfortunate child.

What prompted Jacob with as much force at least as the fear for her life, was a most curious circumstance which set the daughter of Dinah apart from the rest of her kind. The favored child had been born with a cross-shaped mark appearing in the color of blood beneath the skin in the middle of her breast. For the first time it had made its appearance in Joseph, the son of Jacob by Rachel; but in little more than a decade it had been found traced on the breast of Aseneth, the daughter of the Hevite and Dinah.

The shape of this mark was identical with the figure cut on the official seal of the tribal kings, the figure of a knife with cross-hilt, which, in the days of old, in large size, had served as the spade with which the king or the patriarch of the tribe officially marked and portioned off the tract of land allotted to each family. It had always been held to be a sacred sign and to point, in some mysterious manner, with the one arm back to paradise and its history of the fall

of man, and with the other ahead, to a coming Saviour and the redemption of man from the misery of his fall.

Both as a holy symbol and as the emblem of authority the cross-hilted knife, or spade, was held in common reverence by the ancient descendants of Japhet as well as by those of Sem. Not even the profligate progeny of Ham seemed to be excluded from this patriarchal heritage. For in Egypt all the statues of the gods were marked with it in the sacred character of the *Ankh*,¹ the symbol of immortality. It is not by any means improbable that not only the official use, but also the religious veneration of this singular instrument antedated the days of Noah. Hence Aseneth's mark was readily interpreted as a token of especial heavenly favor, and Jacob felt himself charged with the care of the selected favorite of the God of his fathers. It was but natural, then, that he should take the necessary precautions to shield her from the persecutions of his exasperated sons, who, imbued with the spirit of their race, would rather condone any insult than suffer an invasion of their tribal integrity and purity of blood.

This jealousy of their continuance as an unmixed race had received a strong impulse through the divine promise made to their father Abraham, that out of his seed should be born the Saviour of the world. It was a national obligation, therefore, to keep pure the channel of His descent; and although it would have been more humane simply to separate from the tribe all those who did not adhere to its race-law, still it was human enough in the Hebrews to visit stern retribution upon the heads of daring offenders.

¹ The *Ankh* = 

These considerations furnished an inexhaustible supply of food for Rachor's self-reproach and an abundance of fuel for his wrath and consternation at discovering that the favored child was lost. He had betrayed a trust in the keeping of which Heaven was apparently as much interested as Jacob. But Rachor was so disheartened that he forgot to credit Providence above with greater power of disposition than himself. He had been despoiled of a gift of Heaven; hence Heaven also had been despoiled. He was helpless to retrieve his loss; hence Heaven also — by a mistake most common among the desolate, disconsolate, or disappointed — was rendered helpless to realize its designs.

NOTE.—The reader will do well to remember that this narrative is indeed dealing with an epoch of history which appears to be far remote from the dividing line where history began to be written in books, but that in those days history was largely written in stone. The silent witnesses of antiquity have been made to speak in our own days, and from them has been wrested a story of the darings and doings of ancient generations, just as human as the story of mankind's darings and doings of the hour. "*There is nothing new under the sun*" is never more intensely realized to be true than when some eager explorer unearths a sphinx five or six thousand years old and extracts from him a tale as modern as the story of the late Spanish war.

For fuller information on the interesting details interwoven with this story, and for the verification of seemingly impossible descriptions of scenery, customs and characters, the kind reader is referred to *Rawlinson*, *Ancient Egypt*; *L. Szczepanski*, *S. J.*, *Nach Petra und zum Sinai*; *Heyes*, *Bibel und Egypten*; *Kaiser-Roloff*, *Egypten einst und jetzt*; *Freiherr von Ow*, *Hom, der Falsche Prophet*; the *Visions of Catherine Emmerich*, etc.





Chapter Third

GOING ASTRAY

THE Midianites in their flight had followed a northwesterly course which would end at the Northern Walls of Egypt. These walls were erected on the solid land stretching from one lagoon to another and connecting them as one continued barrier to the incursions of the covetous Semites of the East. Egypt, which was called "Kemi" or "Kemt" in the language of the land, probably reminiscent of Cham (or Ham), the originator, through Chus, of the first race of Egyptians, was designated by outsiders as *Mizraim*, the "Land of the Two Walls." Hence in the written language of the country of the Nile all foreigners, but in particular the Semites, who sat on the borders of the eastern deserts which separated Egypt from the Chaldees, were also marked with a specific sign, representing a wall (\ 𐀓), at the end of their names or descriptions.

At the time of our story the ancient Chamitic race had been conquered and was now forced back, up the river, upon Thebes and the adjacent fertile fields of the Upper Kingdom. The late invaders and conquerors, probably Hittites and other Chanaanitic tribes, associated with them, were undoubtedly of

Semitic origin, but had, during the struggle for supremacy and during the subsequent period of affluence and ease, lost many of the characteristic traits of their race. They had insensibly mixed with the residue of the people who had inhabited the country before them, and had from them assumed a change not only in their outward mold, but also in their bent of mind.

There were two sets of Walls. One was in the north near the sea, the other farther inland. But both served to connect the lagoons that intervened between the Northern Wall and the western gulf of the Red Sea. Either Wall was protected by a strong garrison, a fort and fortifications of adequate dimensions. The well-equipped and well-provisioned military divisions were under the command of generals of princely rank. These "Walls" were at the same time the tollgates of Egypt for the merchants from Asia. It was not an easy venture to elude the vigilance or circumvent the exactitude of these outposts, the tax farmers and general procurators of the pharaoh.

Towards one of these gates the Midianites were shaping their route. But their flight towards the north was only a feint to mislead their pursuers. They had to be careful not to miss their companion who had been left behind to accomplish the design of their visit upon the Hebrews. He had been directed to cross the Nahal Musri well towards the south and hold directly towards the southern gate, where the rest of the band were to come up with him. The commander of that gate was known to be more easily tricked than P'tehebra of the north, inasmuch as his subalterns were not so strictly trained to order and precision as those of P'tehebra at the other gate. Hent-ha-nur, belonging to the nation of the con-

querors, could afford to be condescending, and was by nature a little prone to be sentimental, whereas P'tehebra, being one of the conquered who was honored by the trust of the foreign king, had to adhere strictly to the exactions of his office, and was not naturally of a yielding disposition.

Phares, in council with Rachor, had pointed out the probability of deceit in the course pursued by the Midianites. But Rachor was goaded on to insane rage over his misfortune by Rahuel, one of his band, whose mother had been a handmaid among the Moabites, and who had for this reason never received much favorable consideration at the hands of the others; hence he angrily bade Phares "save his wisdom for a brighter day," and brought the deliberations to a fruitless close with a demand for immediate departure in the direction of the Northern Wall.

From midnight until the earlier half of the morning, when the heat of the sun and the glittering of the hot sand began to make progress impossible, they had ridden on in sullen silence. There was no trace of the presence of any living thing over the vast expanse of heated vapor and dust and burning sand. The sky was clear and aflame with the heat of the day, and the depression of mind from which the troop was suffering made the discomforts of the journey almost unbearable.

But the hot sand bed and the fiery breath of the surrounding air held out little hope of relief through a spell of rest. Yet they dismounted, hung their tent cloths loose over a few hastily driven stakes, and flung themselves on the coarse blankets which they had taken from their beasts and had thrown on the ground. No one thought of eating and drinking;

they were glad to breathe with a little more ease, allowed by the relief from the exertion of the ride and from the restraint of their disappointment and exasperation. They were indeed not resting very long before the spirit of comradeship was reawakened and the all-important subject of their shattered hopes was once more made the topic of an animated discussion.

This time it was Rahuel, the untamed son of Moab, who opened the council. Seeing that Rachor was still in a condition of obstinate stupor and that Phares was discouraged beyond the hope of a new attempt at persuading the leader to alter their course, he abruptly leaped into the midst of the vexatious problem, giving a rough jerk at Phares' coat, and blurted out:

"We may as well go home as proceed further north. These Midianite jackals have surely turned southward in order to intercept their solitary emissary with the booty and to bring food to the man and the girl. It would be the ruin of their whole scheme to let the kidnaper and the girl together famish on the way. Now, if you will proceed on the present course, I shall leave you here and go my own way."

"Go, my son," Rachor savagely acquiesced. "You have been following your own way as it is, in all things that have not pleased your fancy. Go, I say; we shall not miss you."

Rahuel instantly was on fire. His face turned purple, his lips parted mechanically, displaying a double row of glistening white and exceptionally strong teeth, like those of a wolf, and his eyes flared up with the lurid flame of anger. He surely was wretched material for a councilor. But he was bent upon having his own will, this time at least. He

repressed the fury that was agitating him, and turning a fierce gaze upon Rachor, replied with a voice muffled and rolling:

"If I go, I shall take the road of the southern gate. It is nearer by a hundred miles to Anu, the destination of our journey, than the gate of P'tehebra —"

"And do you think that the Midianites will take the child to Anu and deliver her to P'hotepra in our place!" derisively exclaimed Rachor.

"No, I do not think that the Midianites are fools; but Anu is one of the capitals where the girl will fetch a better price than in the sober and sedate extreme north, where the clodhoppers of the arms of the Nile are too busy tilling the soil to cultivate a taste for dainty morsels. The Midianites are bound to make the greatest profit obtainable out of their trick."

And Rahuel arose and folded up his blanket, preparatory to executing his resolve. Rachor said not another word. But Phares also arose, slowly, and with a sidelong glance of dread at his chief, folded his blanket, and crept out of the tent on his hands and feet, while Rahuel bowed and flung the flaps of the canvas with a hand high over his head. On second thought several more of the band, who had been silent listeners to the spirited clash, also arose and slunk out. Among them was one, Samma, of huge fleshy proportions and face as broad and vacant as an owl's, save for the standing expression of good-humor that fitted his rounded, ponderous presence as naturally as laughing, full-cheeked fruit fits the somber and vigorous crown of the autumnal apple-tree. One would be impelled to look for it were it absent.

Samma did not take the troublesome precaution of not disturbing Rachor in going out. As he stood

nearly seven feet high on his bare heels, and the tent was little more than five feet in height at the top, he pushed his head into the hood of the tent, which was formed by the union of the ropes about a stake, and raised it, stake, ropes, covering, and all, and with it walked away over the reclining Rachor, leaving the chief and his as yet undecided followers lying in the glaring sun. After walking a few steps, his feet became entangled in the dragging ropes and cloths, and he fell to the ground, all wrapped up and rolled into a bundle. The more he struggled to extricate himself, the more tightly he was wrapped, so that at last his portly figure assumed the shape of a huge sausage, and put in the way of his unhoused companions the irresistible temptation to vent their indignation upon him. Accordingly they armed themselves with loose stakes plucked from Samma's wrappings and lustily belabored the animated "package of dog-meat," as they chuckled, when the victim of his own game manifested his resentment.

The merry incident served to pacify Rachor to a great extent. He could not but join in the hearty laugh of his undaunted companions, and generously pardoned their pranks, when Samma, upon being set free from his uncomfortable attire, red faced and in high dudgeon over such robust handling, reached out after the executioners with both hands and both feet at once, and in consequence fell down again and lay prone, sprawling and fuming, in the sand.

Rahuel had made himself ready for departure. He had not deigned to join in the frolic with as much as a smile of approbation. Phares had held aloof, for fear of aggravating the ill-humor of the leader; but when he saw Rachor unbend himself, he too condescended to enter into the humor of the scene for

its beneficent effect on the leader. Then the preparations for taking up the pursuit of the robbers in earnest were soon completed. It was unanimously agreed that they had made too many concessions to despondency and despair, and the common and cordial resolve was made to redeem lost time by greater show of energy and circumspection.

Now they started off in the direction of the southwest, following the course which the last marauder must have taken with Aseneth. Sun and heat and dust were no longer regarded as difficulties, but rather as a spur to greater energy. For a gain in time was both a gain of speedier delivery from the desert and a promise of the possible retrieving of their loss. With a few brief and necessary stops for rest both for themselves and for their beasts they pressed on undismayed, crossed the Nahal Musri by riding or swimming from one of the temporary islets to another as they popped up out of the flood, and pitched camp at the head of "the Arm of Egypt."

This tract of fertile land can be best described as a peninsula of verdure extending into the sea of sand. At the head of it a small circular lake blinked out from the refreshing green of grass and foliage. It was an invitation not to be declined. Here the traveler could put himself at ease and deliberate for the last time whether or no he really had business of sufficient importance in Egypt to brave the scrutiny of the distrustful watchmen at the tollgate.

Six days had passed since the affray with the Midianites. If these also had turned their course southward towards the Wall of Hent-ha-nur, they were now probably still within the gates and might be overtaken and brought to terms. But the Hebrews


were too fatigued to undertake the last leg of their journey, and to risk the loss of this day and the coming night in haggling with the incredulous officials, without first recovering some of their spirit and pride. At all events, if Aseneth was once taken within the Walls, it was certain that there she would remain. Therefore Rachor posted his guards on the fringe of this delightful bower, and with the rest of his worn and weary band retired deep into the cool shade on the brim of the pool and surrendered himself to the sweet sway of witching sleep.





Chapter Fourth

A GRUESOME FIND

HE one among the fatigued band first through with the tedious occupation of resting was Rahuel. He could sleep riding on the back of a swaying camel or on the back of a tossing horse, but he could not sleep on solid ground. He had stretched his whole willowy and sinewy length in the fresh grass that covered the soft moss underneath like a mat, and had directed his idling gaze into the crowns of the sycamores and palms overhead, intent upon relieving his strained watchfulness with a mental review of some of the last scenes witnessed at home before their departure into the cruel desert and for a strange land.

It was his first journey into the land of the great Sphinx. His supply of the most necessary means of comfort abroad, money and the native language, was very scant. All that the caravan possessed of gold and silver was in the hands of Rachor and Phares, and all the stock of words available in dealing with their future dark hosts was owned partly by the chief and his lieutenant and partly by two or three others of his comrades, the leaders themselves not mustering more than a few stray phrases and a dozen single words. But feeling himself a member of a rather well-equipped company, he did not let his own poverty make him

uncomfortable. During his rambles he reverted easily to this handicap of his, but only as the result of his customary shiftlessness at home.

In the pastures of Hebron and Bethlehem, of Dothain and the Jordan, of the Dead Sea and Segor, where he had often served as herder to the one or the other of the petty shepherd kings, not disdaining to lend his arm at times to a neighboring thief in plundering the sheepfolds which he was hired to guard, he had neglected every opportunity of enriching himself or of establishing his own domestic tent. His love was of war and tumult. He cared little what men were quarreling about so long as he could join in the quarrel, and after the quarrel was settled he cared little for the spoils, but went away looking for a new quarrel.

Shortly before he left on this journey he had been mixed up in a serious contention with the sons of Jacob about their brother Joseph. This boy, about sixteen years of age, had begun in good-natured fashion to lord it over his elder brothers, and even over his aged father. He was gifted with the gift of prophecy, and had foretold them that he was yet to be their king and savior. This special distinction of the boy and his curious claim, together with the preferment shown him by the patriarch, had called forth the bitterest hatred of his brothers. They had repeatedly threatened to kill him, and were at all events resolved to rid themselves of him as an unbearable annoyance.

Rahuel had been a witness to the last of their quarrels about Joseph. They had beaten the boy, had stripped him of his clothes, and had driven him from them naked into the wilderness of the hills about

Salem. Thither Rahuel had secretly followed him and after clothing him with the half of his own coat, had escorted him back to the patriarchal tent. For this mercy Jacob had added the name of Rahuel, the foreigner, to the list of the rescuing party of Aseneth. And Rahuel was proud of the confidence which the patriarch reposed in him.

But Rahuel had before been lying in wait a long time for an opportunity to steal into the favor of Jacob just for obtaining a part in this mission. He had resolved to go into Egypt. It was the land that teemed with prospects and opportunities of fighting, and also of advancement for a man who was constantly thrust aside at home on account of his foreign descent, but who prided himself to be the peer of the best both in council and in war.

He was chuckling to himself as he was recalling to mind the chain of circumstances which had crowned his scheming with success. But the galling defeat which they had met at the hands of the wily Midianites instantly darkened with its shadow of disgrace the brilliant picture he had made of his own circumspection and dexterity. He sprang to his feet, grasped a spear, and stamped away, fretting and scolding with himself.

After two hours, the guards were relieved and replaced by two others of the party, one of whom was Phares, who volunteered to take the place of Samma, the unwieldy and extremely comfortable giant, upon whom the lot had fallen. The companion of Phares was Nathan, a mite of a man, as lithe and neat and sleek as a weasel. Whatever kindly feeling may have prompted Jacob to add him to the party, no one ventured to guess, unless it was that he was

handy in dressing a fresh skin for footwear or in repairing a broken saddle or bridle or a disjointed battleax.

The dignified Phares and the undignified and diminutive cobbler had not long occupied their post when they heard a rustling and crackling in the thicket farther out towards the end of the "arm" like the breaking through of a wild boar. They gathered themselves up and were ready to alarm their companions when they saw Rahuel dash out of the reed and shrubbery and run towards their camp at top speed. He was swinging a large bundle of white, blood-stained linen around above his head, threw it on the ground, vaulted over it as if it were as big as a haystack, returned and picked it up, and at last arrived at their station, again whirling the bundle with savage energy.

He was out of breath. He dropped the ghastly find on the ground and with vigorous exertion of his elasticity and strength kicked it right before the feet of Nathan. The little man cried with terror and ran away, crying, into the sleeping camp. The sleepers were up in an instant and gathered about Phares. Rahuel was still standing apart alone and looked on intently, but with his arms folded over his breast — a sign of his returning cunning.

Amid the confusion of voices and gesticulations quite natural with so untutored a crowd, Phares took up Rahuel's trophy and slowly and cautiously unwound the soiled linen. Once or twice Rachor, pale with excitement, took hold of the long, tangling end and gave a pull and a jerk to assist Phares. But suddenly he uttered a shriek of horror, flung the stained strip far from himself, and with a trembling hand pointed at the bloody imprints of a small hand, the hand of a child, on the linen. The others stared dumb and stiff:

that was the imprint of Aseneth's hand — the child was murdered!

Phares continued nervously to unwrap the tightly wound cloths. The outer one was a rider's mantle, or cloak, large, long, and wide, such as was affected by those whose home was the dusty and heated desert; the second one was Aseneth's upper garment, torn in shreds; the last one, which now revealed the shape of a human head, was the nether garment of the hapless little girl. The imprints of her hand were found on the mantle: therefore, in all probability, she had been killed by the owner of that garment before he himself was killed and his head wrapped in his own coat; for the head which was uncovered with the last turn of Phares' hand was that of a Midianite, of the one who had posed as the chief of the thieving band of their acquaintance.

Phares laid the head down, not gently, but yet not rudely. "Why was not the body of our ward wrapped up here," he said gravely, "if she was killed? She is as surely alive and safe as we are —" Here Rahuel interposed savagely: "The body of this dog is lying in the reedy mud of the bank not far up the lake. I wish that all his band were found to be keeping him company!"

"God forbid," cried Phares. "If they were all dead, our ward also would be dead and lost. Let us hope that they are alive and much concerned about her. It seems, indeed, that they are enough concerned about her to have committed murder for her."

"I resign my position," Rachor said stolidly to Phares, "and lay my authority in your hands. Command, and I shall be the first to bow to you."

"This is exchanging a sheep for a goat," muttered

Rahuel loud enough for those near him to understand. "Let me set my foot over the boundary of Egypt and I shall obey no man but myself," he added, with a disdainful look at both Phares and Rachor, and turned away towards the grove where their beasts were peaceably browsing and drinking. It was getting so late that the long rays of the dipping sun shot but sparingly across the brow of the low range of hills in the southwest; at any rate it was too late to proceed further this day. And the band of anxious travelers again turned in at their camp to spend the greater part of the night as best they could amid discussions of the things that they might have to face on the morrow.





Chapter Fifth

IN THE GATE

MEANWHILE the Midianites had arrived at the "Gate of the Prince." They had indeed at different times before, but invariably under the same circumstances, called at this or the northern station; that is, they had more than once a year, for many years past, asked entrance into the country for the purpose of disposing of their living wares. They formed one of the several auxiliary bands of slave hunters of Theman, the chief among the Eastern traders.

The main body of the troop had rejoined Epher, the abductor of Aseneth, at the "Arm of Egypt" only the day before. In an altercation over the possession of the precious booty, Epher claiming exclusive rights for the success of the capture, his companions made short work of his pretensions and despatched him with the sword. Even during the attack preliminary to his defeat and murder, the courageous bandit had clung to the girl and had shielded her with his body. Aseneth was sprinkled all over with his blood, and in an effort to keep herself from being wrested from his arm had clutched at his coat and had thus imprinted on it the form of her hand.

The body of Epher had been concealed in the reeds

of the lake, but his head had been carefully wrapped up in thick linen bands and had been buried deep in the sand, in order not to expose it to the disrespectful appetite of the jackals and hyenas. The Midianites were superstitious people; they had not been afraid to kill one of their own, but they were afraid so to conceal his head that his spirit might on its return to earth in its nightly wanderings nevermore discover it. Hence they had indeed laid a stone over the low burial mound, but had been careful to draw the end of the wrappings of the head from beneath the stone. There the spirit might grasp it and by it draw the head out of the ground. But the first spirit, and not a good one at any rate, that found the white tag at the mound had happened to be Rahuel, the implacable enemy if to some extent of all mankind, in the extreme of the Midianites.

After Aseneth had passed into the hands of the band as a common possession, and a new leader had been elected in the person of Zare, a man famous for astuteness rather than for courage and valor, the robbers sat down in solemn council. Zare opened the discussion by laying before them the probabilities of a hostile reception at the Wall. "Brethren," he began authoritatively, stating his view of the case, "brethren, I have resolved to represent this girl as the daughter of Jacob. His name is well known among these cowherds. His blood is pure, and it is pure blood of the Semitic tribe that the Egyptian nobles prize above all blood of Asia. Ten fists of gold, I should think, are assured us for the sale of the girl —"

"Have you thought of our chief Theman?" one interrupted him doubtfully. "Theman would prefer to sell her to the pharaoh for a hundred fists of gold.

You well know that we can never press forward far enough to reach the High House¹ in person. It is a pity we should have to sell the girl below her worth."

"We have never been received at the Wall with open arms," Zare continued undisturbed, "and although we have never been detained and imprisoned as kidnapers, still we should not forget that we have never had such superior quality of ware for sale. It may tempt the sentimental Hent-ha-nur to apply the old rigorous laws for once in his long term of office. In order not to expose ourselves to the danger of detection, I have left the credentials of the child in the pockets of our dead chief. But it is imperative that we be of one mind and speak with one tongue. And if the Hebrews overtake us and arrive at the Wall during our negotiations with the prince, we must not parley and explain, but either kill them outright or outwit the Egyptians. Aseneth must remain in our possession until her price is paid in gold. What think you, brethren?"

The same man that had interrupted Zare before once more loudly voiced his objections. "If we tell these ignorant lords of the cow the truth," he said, impatiently shaking both his upturned hands at Zare, "and represent the girl for what she really is — namely, the daughter of Dinah and Sichem, the Hevite — we shall find ready credence and shall obviate all threatening difficulties."

"But the price, man, the price!" another shouted, clutching with his hands at an imaginary purse in the air.

"The price will not suffer from this concession to truth; for the Sichemites are of the same tribe of the Chaldeans as the Hebrews. And the Egyptians care

¹ The official title of the pharaoh.

nothing for the name; they crave the blood and the race."

"But," Zare objected, "how shall we find time to explain to the prince how Aseneth came to be the child of a Sichemite father and a Hebrew mother? If we let the Hebrews in our rear take a hand in our business, we may as well now kill the girl and be done with the whole venture."

Some of the band applauded the spirited retort of their chief, because it savored of blood, but the first unregenerate opponent continued unabashed: "Do you think that the news of the slaughter of the Sichemites, and with it the story of Aseneth's descent, has not been carried across the Walls of Egypt? The children are singing it in the streets, and the washerwomen are rehearsing it on the banks of the holy river."

Again Zare readily parried the thrust. "Egypt also is full of wonderment over the disaffection among the members of Jacob's household. Egypt knows that the same sons of Jacob, who planned and executed the horrible massacre of the Sichemite prince and his house and his people, have also planned the removal by violence or by stealth of their brother Joseph. The wine merchants of the High House are as much at home among the hills of Chanaan as in the Arp-hesep,¹ and the fireside lore of Hal² is as much their own as that of Kemt.³ With their regular cargoes of wine they bring home also the gossip of Chanaan, and with special delight the refreshing stories of the Hebrews about Bethel and Hebron. The Egyptians have not

¹ "Arp-hesep," the Wine District; one of the southerly provinces of Egypt, famed for good wine.

² "Hal," or "Hor," the Egyptian name of Palestine.

³ "Kemt," native name of Egypt; also Kemi and Kemet.

ceased since the days of Abraham to turn an attentive ear towards the land of his promise for an echo of the voice from Heaven that spoke to the grandsire of Jacob. Therefore they will eagerly put forth their hands to seize a scion of the favored tribe without asking irksome and dangerous questions. I propose that we move forward without loss of time and temper."

With these restless scavengers of the desert, "moving forward" was a question of existence. Hence they agreed to follow their leader implicitly and to swear a thousand oaths by Ra¹ or Shem,² as it might become necessary, to every statement he might make, and under no circumstances to consign Aseneth to the power of either the Egyptians or the Hebrews, unless a fair price were paid into their hands.

The Midianites had made diligent inquiry about the destiny of Aseneth, and had learned on their journey with the Hebrews that she was to be delivered to P'hoteptra, the highpriest at Anu. But it never entered their mind to respect the wishes of the patriarch in this or in any other matter not directly furthering their own interests. Once they should have passed the Wall they would be protected by the official seal of Hent-ha-nur, which legitimized both their entry and their business, and they could search to their heart's content after a buyer who should take a fancy to their article. Of course there always remained the danger of disclosures by the Hebrews in their rear; but Egypt, although having only two points of entrance from the East, had many exits in every other direction, and Egypt was slow and considerate in dealing out justice. Before the various officials would be assured

¹ "Ra," the sun, the deity of Egypt.

² "Shem," the moon, the principal deity of the Orientals.

that the Hebrews were not trying to impose on them and seek an easy way of entering the coveted land, they, the Midianites, could accomplish their task at leisure and abscond.

Having thus prepared for possible emergencies, they set out for the treacherous Gates which had often before proved to be the undoing of too confident an Asiatic who harbored treason in his bosom. And although this particular band of Midianites, which always had been fortunate enough to be led by a prudent head, had never before met with insuperable obstacles, yet this time their very salute turned out to be a failure. "The smiles of Ra upon your head with a thousand children and a dozen wives," Zare had saluted Hent-ha-nur at sight, and, without waiting for a leisurely reply, as the proprieties required, had immediately continued: "We have brought down to you a daughter of the Hebrews whom we wish to convey to the priests at Anu. She is the daughter of the chief of the Hebrews, who desires her to be educated in the temple in order to preserve the memory of the hospitality accorded to Abraham, our common father. Let us pass through, and you shall find us liberal on our return."

If the good-natured Egyptians resented anything in a stranger, it was his assumption of authority within the range of their jurisdiction. Zare had blundered. Hent-ha-nur smiled, but with an expression that showed more of his glistening teeth than of his gleaming eyes.

Had Zare been wise and circumspect, he would have had Aseneth clad in presentable garments; but ruffian that he was, he had kept her wrapt in a discarded, faded cloak of one of his men in which the frightened and tired child presented herself as an object

of instant sympathy and deep compassion. Hent-hanur was of an impressionable nature, as most Egyptians of the Hyksos nation were, and the sight of the little girl's predicament went straight to his heart. As he looked her over, his eyes became moist with compassion, and his mouth relaxed and bent down at the corners. Then his nostrils expanded and his brow was lowered; he was silently connecting the plight of the child with the cruelty and neglect of her conductors. The doubt sown into his heart at that moment took such deep root that it was a foregone conclusion that he could never be converted to the views of the Midianites about their mission. But he would not uncover his battery at once. He would give Zare an opportunity of making a false move so as to strike him down with greater and swifter force.

"If your way is the way to the priests," he replied, measuring his words, "why do you enter here with thirty lances?"

"But our way lay through the desert, prince!" Zare cried out, taken aback at the unexpected opposition.

"Here the desert is at an end," the prince countered, "and the country is at peace. Why this show of force?"

"This child was given in our charge by one who is far above us, and we are bound with our souls to protect our ward."

"The man who delivered this child to you must be a man without heart and head, or he would not lay a girl of ten years in filthy rags into your arms. I wonder that she was not choked and burned in the desert. Loosen her wretched bandage!"

Zare began to unravel the knots at Aseneth's throat, but hesitated in doubt whether he should not explain

to the inquisitor that the girl had not been bound longer than half a night in the "filthy rags." But he realized in time that thereby he would betray the whole scheme, and he proceeded. How far the impatient Hent-ha-nur would let him proceed he was anxious to see, knowing as he did that the child wore no other garment but that piece of dirty cloak. He and his companions had seen the cross-shaped mark on Aseneth's breast, and he at this moment remembered it. But the Midianites had unlearned the traditions of the fathers and, therefore, paid no heed to so remarkable and distinctive a signal. He entertained no misgivings regarding that birthmark of his prey. But his fear was growing that, during the progress of this examination, which threatened to be long and severe, the Hebrews might arrive on the scene. The thought disconcerted him so much that he lost control of himself.

"We have no other raiment for her," he blurted. "Why then should we strip her of the little she has? Look at us, prince! Have we not often passed your gate without being searched down to our heels? Are we not also sons of Heber? And is there not friendship between Heber and Ham? Let us proceed, so that we may procure suitable apparel for the daughter of Jacob."

"You are not sons of Heber," Hent-ha-nur replied coldly, "except by that line which is marked with the wild blood of Ismael or of Madian. You have to condescend to dismount. Down with you all!—And stop!" he cried at Zare, as the mark on Aseneth's breast was bared. Then he took off his own gaudy upper garment of the finest of linen and wrapped it about the girl. "Come to me, child," he said tenderly,

and stretched out his arms to take Aseneth from the knee of Zare, who was in a measure relieved, because he would have been hindered in dismounting with the girl in his hands.

Hent-ha-nur retreated to a seat at the wall of the fortress and sat down, placing Aseneth in front of himself. The Midianites were obliged to follow him against their will, for they espied a long line of archers posted on the coping of the wall overhead with bows drawn and arrows ready.

"How have you come into possession of this child?" the prince continued the hearing, with chilly abruptness. He spoke his own tongue, with which the Midianites were tolerably familiar.

This sudden swerving of the inquiry into the dangerous field of their late operations brought Zare to the verge of despair. If Hent-ha-nur knew that the Midianites were hostile to the Hebrews, it was not a puzzle to him but a lie to tell him that a daughter of Jacob was entrusted to the care of a band of Midianites. On the other hand, it was impossible now to change their plea and represent her as a daughter of one of their own princes.

Zare began to perspire from anxiety. His companions, who were little conversant with the language of Egypt and had understood little of the proceedings, noticed the aggressive tone of the inspector and the awkward nervousness of their chief, and also began to show signs of unrest and fear. Aseneth did not understand a word of the discussion, and seemed to take little interest in what was going on, except that she kept her sleepy eyes wandering up and down, from the bronzed face of the prince to the fresh and fragrant garment with which she was covered from head to

foot, and of which a generous length lay all about her on the reddish marble slabs of the court.

But Zare had to make some answer. Hent-ha-nur's features had become so set that he seemed resolved never to speak another word for the livelong day before that last question of his would be answered. His face bore a strange likeness to the firm, friendly, and expectant faces of the pair of huge sphinxes in the shadow of which he had taken his seat.

Yet Zare could find no answer. He could not confess that they stole the child, because the death penalty was in Egypt visited on kidnapers; nor could he invent a plausible story of having received her from anyone else but the patriarch Jacob. And that story had already been told with disastrous result. In the extreme of his embarrassment, which bordered on despair, he resolved to reiterate his former assertions, and "She is the daughter of Jacob!" he bellowed. "I cannot tell you anything but the truth!"

At this juncture Hent-ha-nur bent down to the face of the girl and asked her in her own language: "Are you Jacob's daughter?"

Aseneth blushed for joy at hearing a word that she could understand, and answered timidly, but eagerly: "I am a child of the patriarch in Hebron."

"How have you left your father's tent?"

"I was sent away because my brothers hate me."

"And why do your brothers hate you?"

"Because of my father, who was Sichem, the son of Hemor."

"And who is your mother?"

"My mother is Dinah, the daughter of Lia."

"And whither is your way?"

"To P'hoteptra, the friend of my father Jacob."

Hent-ha-nur looked up at Zare, confused and surprised. Aseneth's answers confirmed every word of the plea of her captors. Had the band, who understood the conversation, been patient and prudent, they might have urged the kindly prince to supply the girl with clothing and with a comfortable litter, and they might have escaped. But they were intent on their own immediate interests, to the utter exclusion of the pressing needs of their frail charge. And this selfishness again aroused the suspicions of Hent-ha-nur, who had allowed a fatherly feeling for the pretty child to take possession of his heart, and was loath to part with her so soon.

"Now let us go ahead," Zare commanded, turning towards his followers and stepping forward to take Aseneth, together with the prince's robe, into his arms. But Aseneth raised both her arms under the garment and clasped them tightly about the knees of Hent-ha-nur. "Be a father to me," she begged piteously, "and deliver me from these wolves!"

"Why are they wolves, my child?" he asked, and threw his arms about her, raised her up, and held her tenderly to his breast. It had never occurred to him to ask her whether these Midianites were her lawful conductors. He had simply looked upon them as rude and neglectful of their charge.

"They have wrested me from the arms of Rachor," she said mournfully, "and they have spattered me with the blood of Ephraim, their chief, whom they killed in the desert."

The spell was broken. Zare leaped on his beast and his companions sprang and scampered as best they could hither and thither among their dromedaries, each to select his own mount. But in an instant the huge

wooden gates of the entrance from the desert flew shut, rattling in their bronze hinges, and a band of archers, followed by a detachment of sturdy black lancers, poured from the fortress and surrounded them.

"Put them in the sheds," Hent-ha-nur directed the guards, "and keep an open eye on them." And as the Midianites were marched to the pen of detention, the prince went away towards his residence in the center of the court, carrying Aseneth on his arm.

"Is Rachor coming to deliver you?" he asked the girl, with the glad familiarity of a fond friend.

"He is out in the desert with Phares and the rest of my friends," she replied, stammering from fatigue; and reclining her head on his shoulder, she forthwith fell asleep.





Chapter Sixth

A STRANGE CONFERENCE

THE household of Hent-ha-nur was typical of the households of the educated class of the officials. He repudiated the polygamous and adulterous habits of the Asiatic princes and lordlings and applied the whole rich store of love and reverence that a noble soul may hold, where it naturally belongs — to his virtuous wife and his dutiful children. His life was regulated by his duties as a representative of the pharaoh and, through him, of the people. The interests of state were synonymous with the interests of the public. Family interests, although the nearest and dearest, were subordinated to the common interests of the state. Hence it was that all Egypt, in time of peace, formed one large, sociable, and harmonious community patterned after the ideal of the true family. Hence also those colossal monuments of the national genius: the temples, the pyramids, the Sphinx, and the obelisks — the products of the united spirit and activity of many succeeding generations.

On entering his magnificent mansion Hent-ha-nur was received by his wife on the threshold of a large common hall which would correspond to the Roman *atrium*.

"Behold, my dove," he greeted her heartily, but without noise, "what precious booty we have wrested

from the wolves of the desert." And he gently laid the sleeping Aseneth into the woman's arms. "Take care of her for a while," he added with a smile of satisfaction, when he saw that his wife pressed a fervent kiss on the brow of the child.

"Thank you," she replied softly, beaming with joy; "just like one of our own." Then she retired with the girl to the family quarters.

Hent-ha-nur's thoughts dwelt little, for the present, on his prisoners. He was filled with anxiety over the delay of the Hebrew conductors of Aseneth. There was more to explain about this curious discovery than he could hope to have explained by the native priests. He did not doubt that the reason for her removal from home, as alleged by the Midianites and confirmed by herself, was the disaffection of Jacob's sons towards her as the offspring of a foreign prince. He understood, however, that it was bigotry with the sons of Jacob to consider the Sichemite blood less noble than their own; for the Sichemite princes could boast of direct descent from Sem, the first son of Noah, by the same lineage as that of Heber. Therefore the Hebrew hatred of these their kinsmen, and of the innocent issue of a union of love between Sichem and Dinah, was nothing but the outcroppings of bigotry and fanaticism.

Thus Hent-ha-nur quietly disposed of the first of the seeming obstacles in the way of Aseneth to the claim of special favors from above. For it was that distinctive birthmark which in his mind lent a special meaning to the existence and fate of the little waif from Hebron. Hent-ha-nur was fully acquainted not only with the mysteries of the worship of Ra, the deity invoked and adored in Lower Egypt, but also with

those of Amen or Ammon, the god of Upper Egypt, between whom there was no more material difference than that of their names, and who were both representative of the idea of the most high and eternal God. He had been taught to look beneath the veil of an intricate ceremonial, which sufficed to satisfy the religious wants of the ignorant and indifferent, and at the same time protected the sacred truths in the heart of the cult from the profanation of too great intimacy and too frequent use. Hent-ha-nur could plainly discern the Creator of heaven and earth enthroned in everlasting light behind the haze of phrase and ceremony. And he had now been intently watching many a long year for either sound or sign from behind the silent and complacent vault of heaven.

The hour was now at hand. With Aseneth, a messenger from the other world had entered into the land. What wonders should not be wrought within a decade! Would the Saviour soon appear? He, of whom the fathers had told such touching legend? He, whose birth should be as of the chaste lotus, pure, secret, serene? Was Aseneth to be his mother?

With these musings Hent-ha-nur busied his kindling heart that happy day, and at the end of his lonely debate he was resolved to lend his power to Providence in shaping the future of his sacred charge. But when men of their own accord, and without a call from Him who shapes the destinies of the world, undertake to assist God and, as it were, come to His aid, the effort generally either terminates in failure or serves merely to protract the issue. Men often deceive themselves in thinking that they do the bidding of God when they in reality impose their own planning and scheming upon the designs of the Most High.

In the evening, when Aseneth was refreshed and restored to her usual composure of mind and body, Hent-ha-nur requested the lady of the house to bring her to him in the large hall which was dedicated to the comfort of the master. The appearance of the child was completely changed. She was garbed in the soft raiment of the youngest of the prince's daughters, who was of the same age, and showed so sweet and amiable a manner of deportment and speech, and so fascinating a charm of presence, that Hent-ha-nur was captivated on the instant of her appearance. With his own hands he placed a soft-cushioned divan right in front of him, between his own seat and that held ready for his wife, and lifting up the girl for a fleet caress, set her down with a show of fondness not to be looked for in a sober official of the king.

"Daughter of Dinah," he addressed her reverently, "I have many things to learn from you, not for your sake so much as for my own. Will you answer me truthfully?"

He reached out for Aseneth's hands, which were lying folded in her lap, and she willingly offered them. "I will answer you as truthfully as I would answer my father," she said, with unaffected warmth and simplicity. "You have done me kindness and honor such as I had not expected." Then she arose, and withdrawing one hand, laid it into the hand of her foster-mother.

"Do you know the meaning of the mark which you bear on your breast?" the prince continued expectantly.

Aseneth answered without hesitation, but also without a trace of boasting or self-consciousness: "The great father explained it to me when he dis-

missed me from home. 'It is the mark of heavenly selection,' he said."

"Do you know for what Heaven may have selected you? Did he also tell you this?"

"'You are bearing the Blessing of Paradise in your bosom,' he said to me as he gave me his own blessing."

"And what is the Blessing of Paradise?"

"The promise of the Saviour of the world."

"And who shall be the Saviour?"

"He who is virgin-born; the Mediator of a sinful race."

Did the girl grasp the range of these hallowed words spoken so lightly? That cross-shaped mark had from antiquity been held to distinguish the believers from the unbelievers, the race of the sons of God from the race of the sons of men. But its significance, as the emblem of the hope of a Saviour, had long been lost from the minds of the people. There was some dull, indistinct expectancy hanging in the air all over the East; but in what form this expectancy was to be realized, none but here and there a sage of every nation would make bold to predict. To satisfy his curiosity, Hent-ha-nur resorted to a feint in order to elicit a definite answer to his doubts concerning the information of the child.

"How was this mark imprinted on your breast?" he inquired blandly, putting forward the supposition that Aseneth had been intentionally marked by those interested in her welfare abroad. But Aseneth quickly raised her surprised eyes towards him and protested bravely: "With this mark I was adorned already at birth, as also was one of the sons of my father Jacob. May not he be the Saviour?" she concluded enthusiastically.

Ah, then she was not initiated!

"Is that son of Jacob born of a virgin?" the prince inquired incredulously.

"Perhaps not," she countered. "But it is Joseph of whom I speak, the son of Rachel; she is the most beautiful and the most devoted woman of our people. And the God of our fathers laid him into her bosom after she had spent her life in mourning the barrenness of her womb. Moreover, our God has promised Abraham that out of his seed shall arise the Saviour."

Hent-ha-nur was losing his self-possession. The whole Eastern world was alive with wonderful tales of this peculiar tribe of the Hebrews. And these tales were too strange to be mere inventions of the fancy. The visions of both Abraham and Jacob, the selection of Jacob, and the rejection of Esau from the blessed heritage of Abraham, the bargaining for the saving of Sodom and Gomorrha from the fiery grave, the terrible fate of Lot's wife, and many more no less interesting incidents in the story of these people were rehearsed at the camp-fires of the Idumites, the Hevites, and Hittites, as well as at the hearthstones of the Egyptians and the inhabitants of Punt.¹ Could it be possible that the advent of the Saviour was so near at hand as Aseneth seemed to believe?

But Hent-ha-nur was ignorant of the fact that at the time and for the reason of the promise of Abraham the ancient tradition of the virgin birth of the universally expected Deliverer had already become obscured among the Hebrews through their selfish cupidity of advancing the cause of that promise on their own account, all fathers and mothers priding themselves on the prospect of ushering into the world

¹ Probably the region of Ethiopia and the Sudan.

the Promised of God, while the heathen nations still clung tenaciously to the virgin birth as the surest mark of the personality of the Saviour. Hence he was confused at Aseneth's words which, while they proclaimed the miraculous origin of the heavenly descendant of Abraham, at the same time teemed with the joyous hopes of her own and her kinsman's selection as the founts of his origin.¹ He resolved to dismiss the child and to await the arrival of Rachor, who probably could enlighten him. Therefore he bent down to Aseneth, taking her hand out of the hand of his wife and enclosing it with the other fervently in his own, and asked her whether she were anxious to go to the far-distant and strange city of Anu.

"I am not anxious to leave you," she replied with quivering lips. "I had rather remain here with you and your children."

"Then you shall remain with us," the prince exclaimed. He arose and went away, leaving the child with his wife.


¹ The fact is that the generations of the B. V. Mary are traced back to Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph and Aseneth, and that the patriarch Jacob conferred his *patriarchal* blessing on Ephraim instead of on Manasses, who was *naturally* entitled to it. — *Hom.* [The maternal line].





Chapter Seventh

QUICK REPRISALS

ONTRARY to the expectations of Hent-ha-nur and to the rules of travel in those parts of the desert, the Hebrews did not arrive that day. Rahuel had been so persistent in his objections to the resuming of the journey before the body of the murdered Midianite chieftain should be rediscovered that at last he had won over to his side the majority of the troop. A diligent search was made about the shallow brim of the lake where Rahuel had first seen the body, the day before; but even after a day's hard labor of beating and pulling up several rods of reeds and bulrushes, nothing was found but a few shreds of wool and of linen, soaked with blood. The body must have been drawn into the water by the crocodiles and devoured. But among the rags Rahuel discovered what he had been most anxiously seeking — the document of Aseneth's identity.

Armed with this proof of the honesty of their claim, they set out the next morning with lighter hearts and fetched up at the toll station about noon. Hent-ha-nur had disarmed the Midianites and had impounded their beasts, but had not denied them the privilege of moving about freely within the walls

of the large court under the surveillance of the dusky archers.

Aseneth had been led out by the prince's children into the spacious gardens, where all the beauties of a carefully trimmed landscape were pointed out and explained to her. Here was a network of rills and brooks and canals and fountains playing with the precious water that she had so sorely missed in the dry desert; here were glowing and glittering flower beds, green terraces, shady bowers and arbors with their chattering and cackling tenants; and at the end of all this wealth of bloom and fragrance, of this abode of ease and pleasure, lay the wide expanse of a sky-blue lake, as large and placid as the firmament of heaven, a laughing invitation to go out from the hot land and sail away into the coolness and comfort of unknown and mysterious regions. And the children had sailed away, in the prince's own bark, with one of the prince's officers, absent from his post without leave, at the helm. Everybody within the walls had heard the story of the beautiful new arrival from Hal, and everybody willingly and gladly made himself her slave. Discipline, even among the guards, was threatened with dissolution. More than one solitary sentinel posted along the garden wall absented himself without leave, just in order to take a look at the foreign little "princess," the "fairy," as she had straightway been dubbed by her young playmates, or to receive a smile from her fair face, or to touch a lock of her long brown tresses.

Hent-ha-nur rejoiced in his heart to notice the pleasurable excitement his beloved ward was spreading all about the length and breadth of the dull and lonely toll station, and his resolution, never to return

her to her countrymen, was becoming so tenacious that he himself began to doubt whether he would find the courage to send her away later on and deliver her to P'hotepra in the temple of Anu. Of what use the girl could be to him when she grew up to maidenhood he did not know. She was dear to him as a strange gift of Heaven, as a gem is dear to its finder out in the wilderness, where none may be found to admire either him or his treasure, except himself, to gloat over a possession that is prized solely for its intrinsic value. Hent-ha-nur had gone so far in his love of the child that he had concluded not even to offer her kinsmen an opportunity to dispute her possession with him. He would keep her out of the way when the Hebrews would enter. He was very much satisfied to know that now she was out on the large lake and secure from any approach except through his own private court, which was strictly guarded on her account. "Hebrews or no Hebrews," he murmured to himself in passing over towards the gates and the garrison, "she is safe with me and willing to stay here. Why should I send her away against her will? And the way to the temple is not so far that I could not deliver her promptly — if a leakage should occur about here." Fire is smothered by green wood, and conscience by a keen appetite.

But before he had reached the entrance, there arose at the wall loud and vehement shouting and wailing, as if two hostile packs of hounds had simultaneously lighted upon a common quarry and had fallen to a canine dispute over its possession. Above the ugly rout of angry voices he heard the tame remonstrances of his guards for a minute or less, and then in concert the authoritative commands of a

few men. These must be strangers here; for such natives, or such tradesmen acquainted with the proprieties of the Egyptian customs office, as would dare to assume a tone of authority at the Gates of the Princes he had never before met during his incumbency.

The court of inspection around the sheds where the Midianites had been quartered presented a revolting scene. All the luckless prisoners, stripped to the waist and unarmed, lay about on the pavement, dead or bleeding to death from savage gashes in the head, the throat, or the chest. And among them were scattered, standing with steaming dirks and swords poised ready for more butchery, several dozen men, whom Hent-ha-nur recognized instantly as the expected band of the Hebrews. Also several of the Egyptian guardsmen were bleeding from slight cuts on the hands or the head, although their lances were clean of blood.

With a few bounds Hent-ha-nur stood in the midst of the scene. "Down with your weapons!" he cried angrily at the murderers. "Bind them," he commanded his own men, "and lock them up in the sheds!"

But that command was more easily given than obeyed; for the Hebrews laughed at him, and as soon as his soldiers made a move towards them, they whirled their dripping swords above their heads, stood together, and advanced in closed ranks, eager for battle. They seemed disposed to hurl themselves into the bronze comb of the projected lances without hesitation or delay. Like a drove of maddened oxen they stormed forward, but unexpectedly parted ranks right in front of the foe, and in the twinkling of an eye passed around the surprised line at both ends, and were making an attack from the rear when a rain of bronze-headed

arrows began to pour down upon the combatants from the crown of the fortress. The waving of the lances and the swinging of the swords in the attack decidedly interfered with the aim of the archers, because their missiles were deflected and diverted from their targets and darted hither and thither, to the dismay of Hent-ha-nur, who dashed out from the mingled fighters to a secure station under the wall. Had he been armed, he should have taken delight in mixing it with the arrogant beggars.

To his utter astonishment, Hent-ha-nur noticed an air of indecision about the actors of this fray, a mutual disposition, as it seemed, not to inflict serious harm. Therefore he motioned to the archers above to stop, and set himself to watching the engagement which soon terminated in an open frolic, the Hebrews confining themselves to landing resounding blows on the shafts in the hands of their opponents and these, to prodding the Hebrews in the sides and the legs without any apparent effort at doing harm. They acted like a crowd of big boys mixed in a friendly contest.

Hent-ha-nur had just returned from his lavishly stocked winehouses and was readily persuaded to look at the comical side of the incident. If a serious misunderstanding with the rude guests could be avoided from the beginning, so much the more easily would his plan succeed to rid himself of them in peace and send them home with a memory of Egyptian hospitality keen enough to last them a lifetime.

In the large dining hall everything had by his personal orders been made ready for giving the conductors of Aseneth a royal reception. The large pots of porous clay, filled with fresh well water, which were used in cooling the bulky wine crocks, were placed

in formidable array in the window openings on the north side of the hall. A double row of bumpers, which might be made of clay burnt to the hardness of glass, or of bronze with a yellowish, glassy lining, was standing on exhibition on a long and wide carpet. Mats were spread along the sides of the hall and along the sides of the carpet, and flat platters of wood were stacked in several piles around heaps of tempting fruit and other heaps of golden-brown loaves and cakes of bread. From the kitchen in the rear came floating in fragrant clouds the steam and smoke of roasting and broiling beef and mutton, so rich and thick as to fill the house and the court and to filter into the wings of the curious wind and to be borne out and abroad the whole range of the station. As soon as the Hebrews had scented the feast in preparation, their rough spirits had been soothed and smoothed down. The same effect had been wrought on the sensibilities of the guardsmen, and joy and peace and a generous appetite had gradually superseded the heat of that scene of fresh blood and surging passion.

After jostling each other about for a while a truce was established by mutual consent, and the combatants arranged themselves in two separate lines, the Egyptians in one at the right, and the Hebrews in another at the left of the prince. But he had not yet recovered from his astonishment; he hardly knew what to think of the farce that had been enacted under his eyes.

"Have ye miscreants conspired to set at naught the dignity and decorum of this solemn occasion!" he roared with a show of forced indignation. But he had to keep up appearances. Why should he be the head of this important royal office, if he would allow the

dignity of the pharaoh's business to be trampled under foot? And blood had been spilled on Egyptian soil! The pharaoh was very partial to the endeavors of his officials to keep even the semblance of unrest from his domain, seeing that it was dangerous to drop the spark of rebellion into a population so mixed and, in part at least, so sensitive to the loss of its former independence and so much on the alert for a pretext to rise and to drive the new lords back into the deserts out of which they had swooped down but three hundred years before. And besides, the Egyptian loathed the sight of blood.

But the slain were Midianites; they were kidnapers; they were murderers; they were liars. Any one of these reasons would suffice to excuse their slaughter, as long as they were slaughtered in a place remote and solitary, so that the populace could not fire its own courage to deeds of bloodshed at the sight of fresh gore. "Let it pass for the nonce," Hent-ha-nur was already grumbling to himself, before the delinquents proffered an excuse. "A dead Midianite is not worth as much as a dead dog at all accounts — but," he continued aloud, addressing the leader of the guards, "why have you suffered the slaughter of our prisoners?"

"Because we could not prevent it, lord," the man replied lightly. "You had given us no orders respecting these travelers whose arrival was due this morning. Hence we let them pass in and conducted them to a shed alongside that which sheltered their enemies. The Hebrews seeing and cutting down the Midianites was the work of an instant. And since we knew that these men had an important mission to you, we did not feel justified in killing them."

"But how have you persuaded them to use their weapons only on your lances instead of on your heads?"

At these words there was a laugh, a big-hearted, boisterous laugh, from one of the troop of the Hebrews. It was the portly Samma who had so indecorously given vent to his feelings. He made an effort to add articulate voice also, but was prevented by a most violent sneeze, and ended in blubbering like one unexpectedly plunged in cold water. At last he stammered and stuttered out: "The smell of the roast, my lord prince! It has sneaked into my nose! I could no more kill a man within sight of a broiling, sizzling, steaming quarter of beef than think of killing myself. Mercy, mercy, mercy, lord! I cannot talk for the water that is running together in my mouth like the Jordan in the Sea of Sodom!"

By this time everyone on both sides was ready to join in Samma's hearty clucking and chuckling. The Hebrews, who had foregone the pleasure of a comfortable and substantial meal so many weeks, were rather to be pitied than to be blamed for the almost insane avidity excited by the scent of the delicious feast awaiting them, and Hent-ha-nur, who was nothing if not humane in his views of the needs of a living creature, had already pardoned them in his heart. If he could without trouble and delay find a means of impressing his own men with a sense of the injury done to his authority, he would be as willing to turn a kind face also on them and to let them share in the coming round of joys, which were not of immoderate frequency at the garrison of the Wall.

Not to be obliged to punish his faithful soldiers with a disappointment of so dearly cherished a pros-

pect as their fill of meat and wine was to them, he set himself to finding an opening for them to defend themselves. But he racked his brain in vain; mainly because a suitable incentive was missing. His men were not really guilty of disloyalty, and their discretion deserved his heartfelt approval, inasmuch as it enabled him to keep the presence of Aseneth from the knowledge of those even nearer the High House than he himself. So he resigned himself to the consequences of his kindness in anticipation of the jubilee which he would make for the participants in a battle that began in play and would now be brought to a finish satisfactory to everyone according to his individual taste. "You should have killed them, Nep'tah," he blustered, finishing the hearing with a complete surrender of his feigned wrath for the present and not certain whether he did not in the depths of his heart mean what he said. It was only his noble good-nature, his compassion for those in need, that triumphed over the more natural desire of removing an obstacle that stood in the way of his full satisfaction.

But obstacles that cannot be removed, sometimes can be passed at the side or can be tunneled, he thought to himself, as he himself was in a fair way of circumventing his bothersome guests. They had not yet inquired after Aseneth; they must be famished, or they must have a respect of their own for the foreign master at the gate. Or perhaps they were afraid that their request for the surrender of the girl might be so speedily granted that they would be obliged to depart before they could taste of the feast now stewing and steaming somewhere within this hospitable enclosure.

These things transpired in a much shorter time than

it takes to tell. When, therefore, Hent-ha-nur said "You should have killed them, Nep'tah," it was in the turning of a hand that Rahuel snorted out: "Then there would not remain a soul alive in this fortress!"

The prince cast a pitying but attentive glance at him, realizing full well the paradox contained in the foolish retort. It served to mark Rahuel in the mind of the Egyptians as a man of passion, but it was passed over: by the prince with a shrug of the shoulders, and by his soldiers with a gleeful grin at the apparent contradiction and at the foolhardiness implied.

"As a punishment for your assumption of authority," the prince decreed, pointing a hand at the Hebrews, "you make haste now to bury the dead Midianites. And you," facing the guards, "wait until evening for your rations."

The burden was as heavy for the one party as for the other. The vainglorious parasites of the tribe of the Hebrews thought themselves soiled at the touch of the dead body of a Midianite, and the Egyptian guardsmen had been promised *rations, delayed rations*, instead of the anticipated revel at a festive board. Both were slow to move. But Hent-ha-nur, who was not ignorant of the misgivings of either party, renewed his command in stentorian tones, and, as if in play, made a sweep with his hand through the air, which was now heavily redolent with the vapors of the good things in store for good servants, and brought it in with a hearty guffaw to his nose. It was an irresistible argument for obedience, and it revived the hopes of the guards in the indulgence of their chief.

The Hebrews — self-styled as they were — fell to their task with a will. "Outside the Walls!" the prince directed them when he saw them pulling the corpses

hither and thither in search of an unpaved spot. The guards were patiently waiting for the word to retire into the fortress. But Hent-ha-nur let them stand at attention until the last Midianite was buried, and then commanded both the Hebrews and the guards to march forward. And they marched by his direction until he had them face to face with the swarthy and squab chief of the kitchen and his fat-cheeked helpers. There they had to face about and march straight into the dining hall. It was not a sigh of relief; no, it was a gurgling grunt of delight that escaped from several dozen hungry throats.

Once within the hall the soldiers were at ease. They put up their lances in a line along the wall and made ready with many a vigorous pull at their belts and many a gentle pat at their stomachs for the anxiously desired, magnificent break in their monotonous garrison board. The Hebrews went wild with delight when they came to understand what the heaped-up platters and the squatting wine jugs signified for them. But Rahuel, in the midst of universal rejoicing, bent his lips to Phares' ears and whispered with much satisfaction: "I did not touch one of the dead dogs, except with the foot. I could not eat with the smell of a Midianite on my hands."

"No, but you could hang," Phares retorted, "and you will yet, unless you take sense!"





Chapter Eighth

"RUACH MUSRI"

THE uncommon show of indulgence on the part of Hent-ha-nur was not a foolish weakness; for not only his troops, but also the guard at the Wall were largely composed of mercenaries from the Land of the Blue Flower.¹ The regular warriors of the hereditary military class were not obliged to serve after the period of their training, except in time of war, and were little disposed to spend their lives under arms in time of peace in the close confinement of the garrison, when the world without was full of life and joy. Thus it was but reasonable that the commander should not emphasize the mistake which his men had made, not from disrespect of his authority, but rather from deference to his intentions concerning the boisterous band of pilgrims from the East. Native Egyptian soldiers would have dealt with the occasion according to the accepted rules; but by so doing they would have endangered the project of their chief with Aseneth and might have drawn upon their post the attention of the royal military inspector, the chief *Mer-Medaiu*. But the less of the incidental diversions at the tollgates was written in the regular reports to the superintendent of the royal treasure house at Memphis, the less was the danger of a rigid inspection

¹ The Upper Nile.

to be feared. Inspections always are irksome. They often bring to light conditions of which none at the post was aware and which mattered little or nothing in the administration of the office, but which have the evil habit of taking on a bad face under the eyes of a suspicious superior. At least it was the policy of the kindly Hent-ha-nur to live and let live and to avoid attracting attention from without.

The repast was begun without much ceremony. At a sign from the steward's rattle, which he shook vigorously, the bulrush hangings over the entrance to the kitchen were drawn back and there appeared a line of waiters, pair after pair carrying each a large tray heaped with steaming chunks of beef and garnished with onions and garlic and leeks, and with spicy herbs, and reeking with a mixture of hot fat and blood poured out to drowning over the juicy meat. Other attendants followed with large crocks of foaming beer, imported from Lybia and served in stone cups as large as pumpkins.

The whole company at once fell to eating and drinking most heartily. They would wrench a joint from the main portion, or slice off a piece with a dirk, and supporting their supply with one grimy hand, would reach out with the other for a bunch of onions and leeks stuck together with a piece of reed, and do them the honor of sacrificial extinction in rapid alternation. Then half-loaves of bread at once steeped in the sauce would be fished out with dexterous fingers and would go the spicy way of the beef and its trimmings, and the pauses between breaths would be improved with hippopotamian gulps from the beer jugs.

Hent-ha-nur looked on from the entrance with mingled joy and horror. He observed with a touch of

satisfaction that two of the Hebrews admirably restrained greed and hunger and made more of a serious play than of laborious toil of their feasting. They were the leaders, Rachor and Phares. Nor did Rahuel, whom he singled out for observation, seem to give himself up to coarse indulgence. He ate with a will and drank copiously, but with a good deal of reserve in exhibiting the pleasure of repairing his disordered inner self. The others, however, and above all Samma, made not the slightest pretense of disguising either the ravenousness of their appetite or the intensity of their enjoyment of the generous and delicious fare.

After a long time only, the tide began to ebb. Rachor, Phares, and Rahuel were the first to desist. Samma continued smacking and chewing and quaffing long after everyone else had finished eating. Rachor made a motion to rise, but was gently pressed down on his mat by one of the black attendants. Rahuel noticed the insignificant incident, and his eyes opened a little wider with interest. He was bound to learn what it might mean. He also arose on his knees, but was likewise pressed down, not so gently as Rachor, the burly black waiter grasping him at the shoulders and bumping him down into a sitting posture. "It is the desire of the prince," he said brusksly, "that you should wait for the wine and the music." If it was nothing more serious than that, Rahuel acquiesced with considerable grace. He loved music and he liked a bumper of strong wine after so hearty a meal.

Presently the steward of the winehouse made his appearance with a following as formidable as that of the chief of the hearth. Samma hailed him from afar with a thick and quizzical "Hallo?" and with open arms. Rachor smiled a most benevolent smile at the

bellying, narrow-necked jugs, each of which wore a cap of sealing wax at the top and a curious print at the side between the ears. He laid hold of the first jug set before him, turned it cautiously, so as to see the impress in the clay, and disappointedly shook his head. The seal was stamped in hieroglyphics. "What is it?" he inquired of the waiter, holding him down by one of the wide sleeves of his airy coat. "*Hek-hast*," the black man replied condescendingly, and moved on. Rachor was no wiser than before. He leaned over towards Phares, who sat opposite, and asked whether he could decipher the strange figures on the crock. "They look much like our fowlyards in Chanaan," he suggested.

Phares studied awhile and then ventured dubiously: "*Hent-ha-nur*," I should guess, "and the year of the bottling, with the name of Amen-hotep, the pharaoh under whose benign and beaming smile the luscious grapes were matured." That was not said without a slightly malicious reference to the idolatrous adulation bestowed on the "Sa-Ra."¹

Hent-ha-nur personally inspected every crock that was brought in, before it was set on the carpet and decapitated with a blunt bronze knife. It was evident that he was as much interested in his winehouse as in his tollgate. And every time he read the inscription of *Hek-hast* a new twinkle appeared in his eyes. "*Hek-hast*," he remarked to the steward, as he passed the last of a dozen jugs out of his hands, "*Hek-hast*: how can a prince of Chaldea forget the land of his fathers?" The steward also belonged to the nation of the conquerors and shared the pride of the prince in their Asiatic origin; for *Hek-hast* was the title which the conquerors of Egypt had brought down with them from

¹ Son of the Sun; a title of the pharaohs.

their Eastern home and had preserved in its original form as a reminder of their nobler descent amid the despised nation of the conquered.

The guests at first seemed not anxious to empty the fragrant cups. The soldiers indeed made little ado about it, filled their bumpers and drank, and guffawed to their hearts' content. But after the second or third cup they were glad to receive their orders to line up and march back to their station. They were not used to real feasting and could not draw more enjoyment from a repast than that which a generous satiety can furnish. They sprang up, shook themselves into shape, took up their lances, and after saluting their kindly host, departed peaceful and contented.

The Hebrews were in an expectant mood. Some of them, no doubt, remembered the object of their mission and were thinking of Aseneth; others rather remembered the promise which the prince had made with the coming of the wine — the promise of music. But as music without the added entertainment of dancing was considered cold and superfluous, they also looked for the dancers, the jugglers, and the tumblers. With these features for garnishing, music formed a point of no small interest for all Orientals. In anticipation of the pleasures reserved for the topping of the feast, Samma drank heavily while beating a lively tattoo on his stomach. Rachor and Phares were depressed. But Rahuel paid undivided attention to the delicious golden flood in his goblet. He sniffed it, sipped it, smacked his lips and clicked his tongue, rolled his eyes in ecstasy, stroked his beard with the complacency of a lion licking the last drops of the blood of his prey from his whiskered lips, and was slowly lapsing into oblivion of his surroundings. The

fiery *Ka-n-Kemt*, the "Ghost of Egypt," was taking a tight hold on the unsophisticated heathen.

Suddenly Samma raised himself to his feet; with difficulty, it is true, and with much uncertainty. But when he had steadied himself, he presented the sight of a tower, weather-worn and bulging, but plumb withal, and massive. With both hands clasped about the goblet which he was affectionately holding to his breast he opened his mouth once and again with an effort to speak, like a fish on dry land, but failed to produce a distinct sound. Another effort, and he sputtered first, and then, with succeeding vehemence, roared: "Pu-pu-prince—; lord prince! Lift up your bumper—this way—" he himself raising his winepot to the height of his chin, "and down with it—!" Samma dipped the brimming vessel, but failing to bring it to his lips, poured the precious liquid into his beard, whence it ran down into his coat, reappearing in tiny streamlets between his toes and under his heels. But he only inspected himself inside and outside for the vanished contents, laughed, and sat down again, holding up his cup to the obliging waiter with the insistence of a self-willed child.

"If his comrades can be prevailed upon to follow his example," Hent-ha-nur remarked to the steward, "we shall have a free hand to pack them together on the fleet dromedaries of the Midianites and expedite them on a journey of horrors such as they shall never wish to repeat." Then he whispered a word to a young man who had been idly lounging around the hall all through the meal, and who disappeared like a shadow behind a platform at the far end of the hall.

This platform was partly concealed behind a low screen of split reeds and bulrushes gaudily colored and

deftly stitched or woven together with colored thread. A moment later the screen was drawn to one side and out on the platform stalked a pair of dwarfs from Punt, a diminutive, waddling man, black as jet and round as a ball, and a dapper little woman of the same hue and proportions. They made a bow so low that nothing seemed to be left of them but a little bundle of white and yellow clothes into which they had disappeared. Before they straightened up again a band of black musicians trooped in, clad in white breeches and nothing else, with kettledrums and fifes and flutes and lyres and a pair of bronze disks intended for cymbals. After them followed a bevy of willowy black girls, also draped in white and yellow raiment, not quite so sparingly as the men. Their hair was plaited in many thin braids, which were closely wound about the crown of the head and made to rise and terminate in a coquettish crest ornamented with blue, yellow, or pink stones, according to the individual tastes of the wearers. Their features were regular, if not particularly fine; but they were young and lithe and full of the mischief of happy youth. In ordinary life they were the maids of the boudoir; but on occasions of feasting they were allowed to indulge their inborn passion for singing and dancing for the entertainment of the guests of the house.

When all the actors had presented themselves, the musicians retreated to the rear, where they sat down on their haunches on a platform about two feet higher than the stage and struck up a chaos of noises, of which nothing was commendable but the visible energy of the performers, one of whom beat time with his hands. But gradually the confusion cleared away and the noise settled down to measure and monotony. At that stage the girls raised their voices with some soft and senti-

mental melody, joined hands in a circle, and tripped a pretty measure to their chant. Then they separated in pairs and triplets, continuing their chant, but varying their motions, pair after pair and triplet after triplet gyrating in and out among the others so lithely and so trickily that before long the stage looked like a huge living, yellow-tinted white rose waving its petals for the joy of living. Then the intricate figure slowly unwound itself, spread out like a fan, ever living and moving, coiled up from both ends without mixing in the center, and ended with a dizzy whirl, all performers fast dancing and spinning at the same time, with arms extended upward and each catching at the hand of the other, until all were again united with hands joined in the original circle.

Immediately after their dance the girls disappeared, never more to be seen; for Hent-ha-nur was a strict master in his home, and the uncouth humors of his guests were not to be trusted with too much respect for the proprieties of a well-regulated house. The Hebrews scarcely noticed the check; for now, as the musicians reverted to their first barbarous confusion and intentional vehemence, the pair of dwarfs were taking position for their trick. The handful of a man stationed himself at the right, and the wisp of a woman at the left of the stage, tripping, swaying, and wagging their heads with the wild flow of the noise, until again order and measure were restored. The flutes and fifes dropped out of the concert and left the field to the cymbals and drums to beat time and to accompany every successful feat with a deafening crash for applause and encouragement.

At the very beginning of the subtle play the little woman came leaping and bounding to the middle of

the stage with surprising agility. There she vaulted over the back of the man, who with equal nimbleness had rushed thither and had stooped down. But the moment the woman leaped up he unbent himself as quickly as a bow released from the string, and just as she flew past overhead he caught her by the feet, whirled her around, and flung her up to the ceiling, where she vanished without sound and sign. The musicians forgot their part of the performance, which was not so strange, considering that also the audience sat dumb, with open mouths and bulging eyes.

The dwarf viewed the scene with exceeding relish. He stood in the middle of the stage, with arms folded over the breast and with a smile of intense satisfaction on his resplendent face. In an instant, however, he extended his arms ready to catch something he expected to come down from above, and clucked suavely: "Come down, kitten; I am ready!" At his last word a large, overfed monkey had jumped down on his shoulders. And now the obligatory crash came with redoubled force. But the monkey turned the tables on the dwarf. Alighting on the floor on all fours, it pushed its head and neck between the short legs of the little man, arose, took him by the head, and flung him up after his mate. Then it climbed up after him on a post at the side, and after some yelling, stamping, and scampering overhead, lo! there came pouring down from above a shower of gold and silver disks, and precious stones, which was followed by a stream of hot molten gold, and then by a flurry of down and feathers, and at last by a sheet of lightning which set fire to the treasures on the stage and spread consternation among both the musicians and the spectators. The musicians fled, leaving their instruments. The

Hebrews were frightened out of their wits. The attendants hurried out of the hall from all sides, and even the servants in the kitchen set up a loud lamentation and scurried away like maddened hares. Only Hent-ha-nur and his steward of the winehouse retained their composure.

But the exhibition was not yet over. As the flames leaped up with savage greed, enveloping the whole stage, suddenly the little man, holding the woman by the hand, smilingly descended from the ceiling into the midst of the fire, blew at it right and left, and extinguished it with his breath. But as he blew at the flames he was seen moving his feet alternately to and fro, thereby closing a door overhead which had admitted the fierce light of the sun beating upon a metallic mirror so arranged in connection with another mirror opposite as to cast the brilliant, flaming reflection on a cloud of flaxen fuzz sprinkled with gold and glass dust. While he had been above he had played the flaring light on the floating material at will and had directed the woman to spin and spread it out as the changing scenes required. The gold and silver disks and the sparkling gems were nothing but tinsel wooden and bronze chips, and the monkey had been impersonated by his clever partner while she was supposed to be lying above nursing a broken head.

The Hebrews, of course, were ignorant of the scheme. It was continued solely for the purpose of entertaining them with an exhibition of the celebrated "black art" of the Egyptian sorcerers and to encourage them to a still deeper affection for the spicy cup. Hence the climax was yet to come.

Most of the Hebrews were pale down to the collar. Samma was half crouching on his knees and half-

inclined forward with his hands planted on the floor to support his upper body, eyes and mouth wide open with terrified curiosity, like a watchdog stunned by a blow on the head. Rachor and Phares were lying on their stomachs at full length, with their elbows firmly dug into the disordered mats and their chins resting on their hands. The others were reclined in equally comfortable, if less picturesque positions, save Rahuel, who had sprung to his feet and was standing up as straight as an arrow. But after he had been standing a little while, stiffened by the terror of the scene, he began to grope about in the air, first with one hand and then with the other, and then with both together, and to sway and reel. He uttered an indistinct imprecation, to which he added thoughtfully: "It is surely not I that is dancing and frolicking around here; so it must be the hall and my companions — for something is moving! And swiftly too," he continued, after a decided lurch forward. Hesitatingly and haltingly he moved forward, pitching about like a boat in a storm, towards Samma, who had his gaze fixed on the stage with creditable persistence. "Help me to sit down, brother Samma," he stammered, and in reaching out after Samma's head fell in a heap on the mellow giant.

"They are getting deep into the toils of the wicked 'Ka-n-Kemt,'" Hent-ha-nur observed to the laughing steward. "Place half a dozen guards about the hall and lock them in. When this wine begins its stewing and steaming, woe be to the sons of Hal!"

He made a turn to leave. But while he was yet speaking he saw Rahuel and Samma together crawl towards the stage on hands and feet. The pair of dwarfs had gone through some desultory dancing, all covered with the fine fuzz and thread of the flaxen maze

still hanging in the air, and were evidently waiting for a forgotten signal. When they saw the two Hebrews approaching them they became excited and darted hither and thither looking for an exit. But the fleeing musicians had closed the only door that led into the open from the stage. The rest of the guests breathed a little more freely and took a more congenial interest in the doings of their brethren than they had shown in the frightful presentation of the fire.

Hent-ha-nur also watched with some alarm. He could not interfere alone, and the steward was gone down to the barracks. But noticing the appealing looks and gestures of his pair of acrobats, he remembered the signal for the climax, clapped his hands vigorously, and started for the door. Then suddenly the dwarfs stationed themselves side by side, and the little woman deftly loosened and unwound the turban of the man and, to all appearances, peeled off his skin from face and head. Then she pulled away his coat, and in turn also his breech cloth and kept on peeling off the black skin in large layers. During the process of the flaying the little man never winced, and when the ordeal was over there was a click and a hiss from the bottom of the stage and a white figure, as of wax, was standing in the place of the little man from Punt, and the woman had in a moment turned stark stiff.

During these manipulations the woman had taken care to stand in front of the man, so that some of the interested spectators had shouted at her to get out of the way of the light. But she had not heeded them until she had finished her trick. Then she had placed herself at the side of the man and had become quiet and motionless.

Rahuel and Samma had halted at the sight of the unbloody flaying of the dwarf. They had half raised themselves, and embracing each other they succeeded in maintaining a tolerable pose. "If you have no one to take off your skin," Samma drawled, "I will give you a hand, my little black pet. I should like to have brother Nathan make me a pair of leggings of your greasy pelt!" And together they shuffled on and reached the stage. Each one made a dash for one of the figures, Rahuel grasping the nude manikin and Samma lunging forward to take up the awkwardly stiff shell of the woman; for such it proved to be. It collapsed in his hands. Had they been sober they might have thought of examining the floor of the stage with its sliding traps and, from beneath, a secret exit. But the traps could not be moved from the stage; they were controlled from the outside.

Now pandemonium reigned. The clay substitute for the dwarf was tossed and kicked about and was made to drink wine — which readily enough entered at the mouth and left at the heels, for the whole poor make-up was as hollow as a bladder. At last Samma made a most ceremonious ending of the diversion by turning a brimful cup of wine upside down over the head of the figure, and pressing down the cup, crushed its hollow skull. In this shape he set it on the carpet, amid a litter of bones and other remnants of the feast, and put a garland of leeks and small onions around its empty "crown" and a bunch of green herbs in each of its contracted arms, and bowing his forehead low on the floor before it, hailed it hilariously as "Rahu, the imp of Babel and the father of Rahuel." Thereupon Rahuel dragged towards himself another of the huge wine jugs, filled his bumper, and

passed the jug along the line. On taking out this jug, he had discovered three or four others snugly ensconced in a large basket, pulled them from their cover, and placed them between himself and the insatiable Samma. On one of them he noticed a different inscription, despite his distorted vision, and seeing dimly that some persons were darkening the entrance, he called to them to help him to read the seal of this “heavenly dew.” The newcomers were the guards appointed to watch over the doomed party of revelers. One of them drew near to Rahuel and read for him: “Ka-n-Kemt, forty-five years old, as old as the prince.” “What is this ‘Ka-n-Kemt’?” laboriously queried Rahuel.

Now this soldier had long served at the Gate and had picked up a smattering of the manifold tongues spoken by the tradesmen from the East, and being somewhat of a wag he volunteered a free translation. “*Ruach Musri*,”¹ he shouted at the questioner, “of an old and rich vintage, all the way down from the *Arp-hesep*, the vineyards of the great temple of Ammon-Ra; a drop sweet enough to turn you into a woman!”

“Then women we shall be, Samma,” Rahuel exclaimed, butting Samma vigorously in the ribs with his head, like a goat, “and you” — to the guard — “you go your way, lest this sweet drop make a man of you!”

The guards went away, each to his post to look on from the distance. “*Ruach Musri*,” Rahuel cried from time to time with increasing delight. “*Ruach Musri*,” Samma seconded feebly, and “*Ruach Musri*” re-echoed like a devout and prayerful response from the long double line of the vanquished assailants of the artful, deceitful, delusive, and revengeful *Ghost of Egypt*.

¹ The same as “Ka-n-Kemt”; the Hebrew for *Ghost of Egypt*.



Chapter Ninth

"RUACH MUSRI" MATERIALIZING

WHEN Hent-ha-nur left his guests he went directly out into the gardens to look for Aseneth. Now he was certain that in the night he could send the Hebrews away to an oasis in the desert, many hours distant, and allow them to forget the child over the attention their reviving from the thralldom of the *Ghost of Egypt* would require. But looking ahead to the probability that they would be tempted to return after recovering from the effects of this fearful debauch, he had instructed his most skilful potter to fashion a figure of clay, of the size and proportions of his ward, and had ordered a set of garments from the master of the wardrobe with which to dress up the puppet in imitation of the robes put on the corpses of the Egyptians when prepared for burial.

On his long and leisurely walk through the shady arbors he met many of his feathered pets, finches, and starlings, nightingales, larks and humming birds, partridges, pheasants, ibises, bitterns, storks and cranes, and a host of others of the jolly tribe of songsters and fishers, some only asking temporary hospitality on their absence from a colder clime, others native to the soil, but all equally noisy in their protestations of gratitude to their benevolent host.

Today he passed by without much attention to their full-throated chirping and rasping. At his neglect of them several bold and boisterous little fellows, veritable balls of down and exasperation, no larger than sparrows, came tumbling down from the trees along the path and danced and hopped and scolded angrily at his feet, just keeping a safe distance from his tread. But he stooped and picked them up, and tossed them back among the nodding leaves. His thoughts were with his new acquisition.

At the shore of the lake he espied his own barge away out, flying before the wind like a huge seabird, with every sheet bellying and straining. His keen eye discerned the official at the helm, and Aseneth perched on the seat of honor in the peak, with all his children and a woman, who probably was their mother, grouped around Aseneth. He was rather pleased to know them so far remote from the indescribable scene in the dining hall. Yet he had resolved to let them all take a look at the degrading spectacle of such unmeasured debauching, if only for the purpose of impressing Aseneth with an unconquerable aversion for her countrymen and their continued company. — But was not he more at fault than the exhausted wayfarers whom he had led into temptation?

Towards evening the boat returned to anchorage in a shady little cove, very close to the arbor where the prince had passed his time musing and scheming and nodding at intervals in deference to the requisition of the previous sleepless night. But when the boat had noiselessly slipped in on the sandy beach and its occupants had noisily disembarked, he came to with a start and hastened to meet them. Returning the fervid salutes of the members of his family, he took up

Aseneth into his arms and caressed her. With a few words he acquainted his wife with his scheme and the preparations for its success, and proceeded to the dining hall. At its entrance, however, he bade his own children go to their apartments, set Aseneth down, and, taking her hand, knocked at the door. The guard inside opened cautiously and they stepped in.

Rachor was the first to espy them, at least in outline, and hemmed solemnly as he made his address of welcome. "Thy face, O Prince, is as large as the desert, and thy friendship as sweet as the milk of a cow of Dothain. Thy wine is as strong as a wild ox, and the number of my brethren is doubled. The legs of this my son Phares have sprouted and grown with the strength of thy wine, and my own legs are tied with the bonds of incurable lameness. And my beloved son Rahuel is made as long and as sleek as a serpent standing on its tail, by thy generous *Ruach Musri*, which he has drunk like a fish. Another drop, therefore, O Prince of the Gate; we do not wish to slight thy lavish hospitality."

No indeed, there was no evidence of slighted hospitality. On the contrary, there was evidence of the liberty the guests had taken with the winehouse. They had attacked the steward and the few guards in the hall, had wrenched the key from the steward, and had opened the sacred cave where the yield of many a year of the pensive vine of Saba was reposing in magnificently glazed jugs. A few of them were lying about or rolling between the delirious carousers, being kicked from one to the other in childish glee. Also the smaller bottles of vitrified lime, which contained each a man's full potion, had been discovered and sampled. Samma, outstretched supine on the carpet,

had the neck of one of them between his lips and was sucking it as assiduously as a starved cannibal might suck a bone. This wine was strong enough to bear down with disaster the bovine resistance of a valiant Elamite. No man could stand up before it. It was the product of the royal wine presses of Thebes, pure as the water of a virgin well, and clear and golden as the sunbeam, a medicine for the old and feeble in moderate sips, a stimulant for the vigorous in considerate draughts, but in copious libations, living and avenging fire for anyone.

And now the luckless wanderers from Hal had imbibed streams of it over and above the flood of the other exquisite wines of Thebes and the generous brands grown in the domestic Arp-hesep. Small wonder, then, that Hent-ha-nur found them in a state half-way between the bliss of paradise and the imminent vengeance of hell. Of all these reckless debauchers, Rahuel was the worst. His natural ferocity of temper had changed into a ferocity of tenderness. When the prince entered he stretched out both his arms towards him and sputtered: “Aseneth, come to me, quickly. I will give thee a kiss as big as a house.”

Hent-ha-nur was not inclined to entertain the desires of the brute. “Go,” he said to a soldier who had just entered, “go and let that beast caress you.” But he declined the honor and stepped aside behind the prince. Rahuel persisted: “Come, girl, or I must punish thee.” Thereupon Hent-ha-nur took up a small empty basket from the floor and flung it straight at his head. Rahuel caught it partly in his arms and partly in his face, and hugged and caressed it effusively. “O thou dear, sweet, beautiful little maid,” he gushed, pressing the hard receptacle to his bosom;

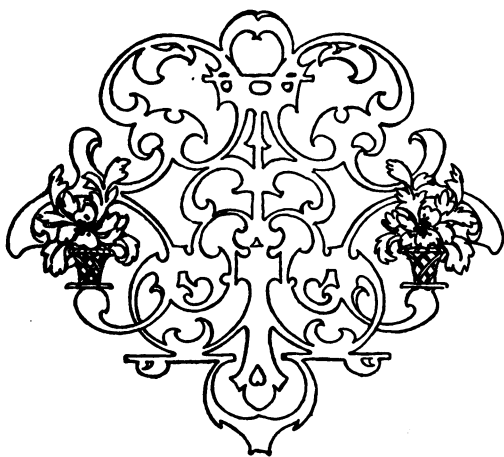
but after a little while he stopped, held the basket out before his dubious gaze, shook it, and remonstrated: "Maid, thy cheeks are hard and thy hair is stiff and straight — thou art not my darling at all — away with thee!" And he threw the basket back in the direction of Hent-ha-nur and essayed to rise, but was content with balancing himself on his knees for a moment, and then fell forward on his face, in which position he was overtaken by complete stupefaction.

Aseneth begged to be removed from the revolting scene, and the prince gladly sent her away with his equally disgusted wife. For the rest of the devotees of the deadening bumper were not less given to dangerous frolicking than Rahuel, except Rachor and Phares, who were lying side by side on the carpet in peaceful oblivion. But it was not long ere everyone submitted to be captured by the treacherous *Ruach Musri*, and Hent-ha-nur placed a guard over them and gave orders to prepare the dromedaries and the faithful Merob for their removal at nightfall.

Meanwhile the first symptoms of the approaching miseries made their appearance. A slight convulsion accompanied by a groan full of anxiety; a moan of awe-inspiring earnestness; stammered protests as if against stalking specters, and a painfully piteous *Ruach Musri* now and then — all these signs of suffering, together with spasmodic twitching and jerking of limbs and muscles, boded a veritable devastation to break upon the wanton desecrators of the Ka-n-Kemt.

The subsequent task of tying them on the beasts was not easy. Everyone was dead weight, limp, numb, and helpless. But the experienced black soldiers, and the servants were used to do efficient and

expeditious work, and at nightfall a somber cavalcade of black horsemen was escorting the silent caravan through the yawning gate. In the rear of the train Merob was stamping along, pensive and sober, with the accustomed litter of Aseneth strapped on his back. The suspicious old beast seemed much dissatisfied: what business had the potter and the chief of the wardrobe had to tamper with the basket just at the moment of departure? And the occupant of the litter was so quiet, so still, and so dead — and yet, Merob seemed to know, Aseneth surely was not drunk!





Chapter Tenth

THEMAN

THE disappearance of Aseneth was soon noticed in the tents of Jacob, but not soon enough to make pursuit seem advisable. The members of his own household, and of them especially his sons, upbraided the patriarch with his cowardice, as they maliciously misnamed his solicitude for the safety of the child. But such ranting was rather the outgrowth of anger and disappointment than of genuine regret or resentment. For they well knew that Jacob had resorted to that measure of prudence solely for the purpose of relieving Aseneth from their persecutions, so that their reproaching him was rather a compliment to his solicitude.

But there was another matter of still greater interest left in their midst to keep their envious tongues busy. Long before the abduction of Aseneth another star had arisen out of the children of Israel. In Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, whom Rachel had borne him at an advanced age, the signs of the predilection of Heaven had been made manifest on several occasions. His brothers had dubbed him "the Dreamer" and his father had foretold of him that he should some day become their king, because in two distinct nocturnal visions Joseph had seen the foreshadowing of his future elevation both above his brethren and above

his parents. Aside from these exceptional marks of the favor of a higher Power, Joseph was distinguished by a passing grace of personal appearance, enhanced by the gift of a wonderful sagacity of mind and sweetness of manner, which had as much captivated his father as it had repelled his brothers. His parents doted on him, preferred him before the rest of the family, and lavished upon him not only an exuberant devotion, but also the somewhat circumscribed generosity of their parental vanity, tricking him out with fine garments and, in particular, with a beautiful coat of many colors.

But Joseph was so simple of heart that he remained ignorant of his preferment. It was his delight to go out in search of his brethren in the distant pastures and detail to them with honest simplicity, one day, the wonderful visions with which Heaven was favoring him, and another, the sweet effusions of his father and mother. And when his brethren glowered and sneered at him he was prone to ascribe their bad grace to ill-humor over their troubles with the herds and flocks rather than to ill-will and envy.

His father had warned him not to be so insistent upon his happiness with his stolid brethren. But Joseph, from sheer necessity of imparting some of his cheerfulness to the men out in the lonely fields of the hillside, innocently neglected the warning and continued telling and retelling the mystifying experiences of his converse with Heaven.

His brethren had long grown weary of his tales which, in their eyes, were nothing but the vainglory and boasting of a pampered pet. They had threatened him not to come out again to molest them with the story of his elevation over them and their venerable father, and they had resolved among themselves

to bring the prospects of his visions to naught. "We will kill him," they had agreed, "and then we shall see what will be the issue of his dreamings."

So when one day he again appeared in their midst, joyful and happy, they fell upon him, stripped him of his beautiful coat, and maltreated him. He would have been killed at the time had not his eldest brother Reuben pleaded for his life. "Do not kill his life," he had entreated the exasperated band, "but cast him alive into the ditch, so that you keep your hands clean from your brother's blood." And Reuben's pleading was, at least temporarily, successful; Joseph was cast into a dry cistern. There he might starve to death, or die of grief and terror. What was it to them, if only they were rid of the hated boy!

Towards evening they espied a caravan of Ismaelites coming down from Galaad and wending their way along the road between the hills and the river. It was one of the regular trains of merchants, composed of Ismaelites and Midianites under the leadership of Theman, who was carrying on a steady trade in spices, balsam, myrrh, and other articles of luxury with the Egyptians. Occasionally he would not be averse to conducting also slaves into the far land of the Nile, where royal prices were paid for desirable living ware.

Reuben had taken his brother Juda into his confidence for planning Joseph's release. But although Juda heartily approved of saving the boy's life at all hazards, yet he realized the utter impossibility of rescuing him as long as his brothers were in the neighborhood keeping a close watch over the cistern. At the same time it was clear to him that the boy would starve to death before they would move on with their flocks. Nay even now some showed a desire to cast stones

upon him in order to be sure that he should not be taken out alive. At all events, none could vouch for his safety as long as his exasperated brethren had an opportunity to wreak their vengeance upon him.

Under these circumstances the appearing of the caravan of foreigners was a most auspicious coincidence. It would not require much persuasion for Reuben and Juda to sway the minds of their brethren from their bloody design and to move them to sell the boy for a handful of silver. And if fate was kind, the boy could be bought back and could be restored to his father before the merchants crossed the boundaries of the land.

The sons of Jacob had pitched their tents along the Road of the Philistines,¹ which was frequented by the busy merchants from the north and the east. It was the road where Theman was moving forward with his train of heavily laden camels. His progress was accompanied with an air of prosperity and security that marked him as a master and veteran of his trade. He had on other occasions often provoked both the curiosity and the admiration of the plain shepherd folk of lower Chanaan. It should not be difficult, Juda reflected, to persuade his brethren to negotiate with the merchants for the sale of the boy.

"What will it boot us," he argued anxiously, "if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Is it not better to sell him to the Ismaelites than to stain our hands with his blood? For he is our brother, our flesh."

"It is a good word you have spoken," some responded instantly. "Whether we kill him or sell

¹ In those early days: Along the Dead Sea, through Segor, and along the northern border of the desert of Sin, the original home of the Philistines; the *Via Maris*.

him, we shall be rid of the sight of his pride; we shall be obliged at any rate to make plausible excuses to his father." Also others were not slow in showing their willingness to barter their brother for a small sum of money, "just for the sake of appearances." "Go ahead," they growled. "Anything is more bearable than his parading and strutting"; or some other equally unkindly expression of their consent and satisfaction.

Therefore, when Theman came abreast of the camp, Juda hailed him and asked him to dismount. "We have a slave whom we wish to sell," he said with some uncertainty.

Theman climbed down from his comfortable seat on the back of a huge spider-legged camel, and showed himself willing to enter into negotiations. "But do not protract your business beyond a reasonable limit," he cautioned Juda, dubiously eying him for the novel offer of a slave from the hands of a Hebrew. "The sun is already dipped in the sea and shadows are growing long; we have still a goodly stride to go before we may drive a stake for a tent." That was the Oriental way of expediting a bargain: to begin with a lengthy warning that it must be briefly concluded.

Joseph was drawn out of the ditch. His eyes were red from weeping and his face was pale from dread and terror. He was hungry, too, having been cheated out of his meal when he arrived that morning from a long journey, expecting to breakfast with his brethren. "What have I done," he lamented, turning his eyes reproachfully on Juda, who had been accustomed to take the boy under his protection; "what have I done that you should demand my blood? And you will bring our father's white hair into the grave if you make away with me."

Here one of his brothers laid a hand over Joseph's mouth and rudely bade him "hold his peace if he valued his life." Then they took him aside and informed him of the dastardly scheme of selling him into slavery instead of killing him on the spot, and again impressed it upon him to be silent and not to betray them on his life, "because," they said, "we have made you out to be a slave from Sichem. Thus we deal by him who wants to lord it over us and be our king, and who has stolen away from us our father's heart. Make no rout, boy, or we shall roast you like the kid roasting yonder on the spit."

But such precautions were unnecessary. The Ismaelites who were living together with the Midianites, so that they were often mistaken for their equally semi-barbarous neighbors, were not burdened with a sensitive conscience. They had no faith, and the few superstitions which they practised in place of religion did not in the least conflict with the ethics of their trade. They were little troubled by doubts about the origin or the destiny of their wares. They were the purveyors of kings, kinglets, and princes, the middlemen between honest toilers, or thieves and highwaymen, on the one hand, and the luxurious class of the bold and mighty who had gained eminence and power through the sword, on the other.

Dan, the most passionate of the sons of Jacob, directly forced negotiations. "A small sum will buy the boy," he suggested; "there is no use in bartering. We want to get rid of him, and you are the man to take him."

"Where is his home?" Theman inquired systematically, "and how much do you want for him?"

"He is from Sichem, of the tribe of the Hevites."

That was a lie, and Theman surmised as much. He was not as ignorant as Dan would have liked to have him. The cruel vengeance visited on Hemor, the chief of the Hevites in and about Sichem, had been made the subject of lengthy and deep discussions in all the districts of Chanaan and in the Hauran across the Jordan. According to the Ismaelitic code of morals it was indeed not impossible that the Hebrews should have turned one and another of the handsome Hevite boys into money, and on this account Theman pretended to take the bait, hook and all. But he could not forego the pleasure of injecting a drop of his terrible suspicion of the real facts of the case into his ironical reply.

"Business is business, my good man," he blustered. "We brand our bags and packs with our seal and, if you so wish it, we shall brand also your slave. Then mayhap he is a native of Galaad, the sons of which are not strangers in Mizraim. Do not trouble yourself, son of Jacob! But let us see whether he is of good figure and has a handsome face. This counts for much more in the land of the Walls than the titles and offices of foreigners; especially with the women who love to keep the handsome boys of the East about themselves."

Dan was exasperated at the cutting scorn of the despised heathen. He almost regretted not having put the knife in the boy's heart. But a glance at the set face of Juda sufficed to convince him that now he could no longer deal with Joseph at his own will. Juda was determined that his wishes also should be respected. Dan turned away and called for Joseph to come forward.

At the appearance of the "slave" the Ismaelites

could not contain their admiration. He was so well formed, so neat, and clean cut of limb and face, and withal so meek, that the rough men from the south involuntarily yielded to a noble impulse of respect and delight. His saddened gaze, his tousled hair, his bleeding and swollen limbs, which had been scratched at the cruel stripping, invested him with the charm of innocence maligned, for the defense of which even a barbarian might risk a pass. Theman half closed his shrewd eyes, and after a comprehensive look, again turned to Dan.

"How much will you take for him?" he asked coldly. "He is very young and green, and a little worn. If his scratches do not heal smoothly, the price of that much skin will be taken out of the bargain."

"What do you think he is worth, Juda," asked Dan brutally, facing his shamefaced elder brother. But Juda whispered to him: "Why should we haggle? If the boy is not removed before Reuben returns, you will have no more power to sell him. Ask of him thirty pieces of silver."

Dan, therefore, again addressed Theman. "Thirty pieces of silver," he said, "full weight and fine."

"Too much, too much, my son," the Ismaelite remonstrated, spreading out all the fingers of his hands against the suggestion of the enormous sum. "At this price you have already cribbed the profit. Let us say twenty."

But now Dan flared up. "What!" he cried derisively. "Twenty pieces of silver for the blood of J——?" He had betrayed himself, and stopped, madly chewing his lip and foolishly eying his discomfited brethren.

"It is not a question of blood," Theman interposed cunningly; "it is a question of straight limbs and a clear skin. Take twenty or keep him." And he moved towards his wondering beast.—Was he sincere? He cast a longing glance at Joseph as he strode away.

These proceedings must have been odious to Joseph in the extreme. "Take twenty pieces of silver," he sobbed, overwhelmed with the brutality of the act, "and let me go away."

Juda left the party. Those who remained seemed not a little put out of countenance; for the meekness of the boy in offering himself for sale as the victim of their envy at last disarmed their hostility. But at that critical moment one of them made such a failure of his effort at suppressing his sympathy that he blurted out: "Who knows but he is only feigning such meekness! It is his pride that goads him on to rebuke us in this manner. He is a visionary and schemer; it is just a trick of his, to show us how deeply he despises us."

Half-hearted suspicions of this kind were reflected from all faces in a moment, and the stir of sympathy subsided again to make room for their long-nourished aversion. On the other hand it was quite noticeable that the heathen traders, ignorant of Joseph's distinctions, and judging the revolting transaction simply from the side of its bold, ruthless cruelty, made no effort to conceal their contempt. Many a flashing glance was shot over at the flesh-mongers and many a pair of stiff lips was parted over firmly set rows of glistening teeth with the expression of utter scorn. Even Theman, the matter-of-fact business man, whirled around angrily like a dog that had been treated to a misplaced favor from a foot, and snapped at them:

"Have you heard it? He himself does not value himself more highly than we — and he ought to know the price of the blood of Jacob!"

This was a dash of deathly scorn. It burned deeper into their souls than the shame that was of their own making. And yet, realizing that they no longer had a choice but between selling or killing him, a retreat from the outrage being thought impossible, Dan took Joseph's hand and led him up to Theman. "Take him," he urged, "and may you be blest with the burden of him!" But the "blessing" was a Hebrew euphemism for a curse when pronounced with such ironical intonation.

Theman smilingly loosened his belt and counted twenty pieces of silver into his flat hand and held out the money towards Dan. But neither Dan nor anyone else was courageous enough to touch the blood price in the presence of the victim. Hence Theman pitched it on an old coat which lay near the fire and which had served one of them as a cushion.

"May it bring you luck as you deserve it," he said scornfully. But perhaps none heard him, because they had already slunk away one by one. Theman assisted Joseph into the seat at the top of his towering beast, climbed after him, and signaling to his train, quickly moved away on the road of Sodom and Segor on the western bank of the Jordan.





Chapter Eleventh

PAINFUL AWAKENING

RACHOR'S band in sorrowful plight had been conducted out into an oasis half a night's ride away from the "Gate of Egypt." Their sufferings were numb and dull and, so to say, from the dark and distance, of the nature of ache in the bones, not easily located, but resolute and persistent. The precious, fiery blood of the grapes from the royal vineyards of Thebes was endowed with a gift, all its own, of laying a fearful contribution on intemperate indulgence. It would only gradually, in sections as it were, release its victim from bondage after it had held him in blank despair and black misery for the space of a long day or two. From the ends of the hair downwards to the seat of actual abuse, it ransacked the wretched transgressor, and stirred up and flayed every individual nerve and fiber and filled him with such abject despondency that there was not enough spirit left in him to lay hands on himself and end the torture. To creep into the earth like a worm and die an unlamented death was the only impulse not paralyzed by such remorseless tyranny.

Such were the woes of Aseneth's custodians on the day after their ignominious exodus. Their guards had accompanied them half the night, until the designated spot was reached, and had then turned back,

leaving them to themselves, after they had been unpacked and unstrapped, and had been laid out in line like so many corpses, in the damp grass. The camels had been tied to the palms by long tethers so that they might graze freely without the risk of their wandering away. Before they had departed from the silent camp, the black men had offered their good wishes in their own crude fashion, felicitating the wretched company on the harmony that now prevailed among them and on the experience they would make on "awakening to the aftermath of so godless a revel in the delights of the sparkling goblet." "In the end," their captain said dryly, "it will all be a question of how they will get along together, the *Ruach Musri* and the *Ruach Shem*."¹

That whole night the captives of the *Ruach Musri* lay still in silent stupor. Life began to reassert itself tentatively only towards morning. A jerk or a toss of some troubled head, a groan of unspeakable misery from a troubled breast, a twitch of an arm or leg grown stiff from disuse, the blinking of a wondering, terrified eye, or the protrusion of a parched tongue, were the first timid efforts of outraged nature to reintroduce its activity. Some of the sufferers turned over to lie prone on their stomachs with their faces pressed hard into the hollow of both hands. Others curled themselves up like hedgehogs, with their heads between their knees. Others again spread their legs far apart in a futile effort of seeking comfort, laid their hands under their heads, and listlessly watched the graceful swaying of the fresh palm leaves overhead in the morning breezes. One or another turned over on the side, drew up his knees, and buried his head in

¹ "The Ghost of Egypt and the Ghost of Sem."

his clothing like a goose on the ice. Phares alone tried to rise to his feet, but again resigned himself with a disconsolate look to his recumbent position in the grass. At his side lay Rachor, who at first cast dubious glances at his daring companion, but a little later himself made an effort to gain his feet — and succeeded. Not being quite sure of himself, he flapped his arms, like a nestling, and encouraged Phares by his looks to repeat his first experiment. Phares followed the coaxing, and holding himself at Rachor's coat, drew himself up and stood erect. Several others rose laboriously, holding each other by the arms, and grouped themselves about the two leaders in such a manner as to form a miniature pyramid, all the heads being inclined towards Rachor and Phares as their center and support. After exchanging a series of silent comments by way of looks and grimaces, among which faint smiles of fearful humor flitted across their faces, they began together to move forward, backward, and sideward. It was good exercise for their stiff joints, and a little practise revived their courage to separate and to go each his own way. But the individual tottering and swaying was too dangerous; they were again reaching out for each other to reunite, in which process several broke down in the knees and fell in their tracks.

Suddenly a sound fell upon their buzzing ears which everyone would likely have uttered had he been able to define his feelings. "Water!" someone had shouted. And looking in the direction of the sound which was repeated several times in variations, they saw Rahuel crawl on hands and knees towards the trough at the cistern. "Water!" they cried together, and moved after Rahuel. Even those who had not

yet arisen were electrified by the sound of the saving word and rolled and tumbled about until they had joined the medley of helpless poses and ardent gesticulations at the niggardly fountain of salvation.

The cistern, or rather the well, was quite deep, but for the reason of being continually in use was constantly also nearly drawn dry. But what its supply lacked in quantity was amply made up for in quality. The water was cool and limpid, while the supply of other cisterns, not very far distant, was turbid, insipid, or brackish, and as light as the sand that furnished it. It caused heartburns and nausea and would have been deadly poison for the poor travelers' stomachs in that volcanic disposition.

The pair of leather pails, suspended by long and slender thongs, went on diving and dipping for a considerable length of time before the thirsty patrons were satisfied and the trough was filled for the beasts. But after everyone was filled to his capacity, everyone from time to time, at short intervals, opened his mouth for a large gasp, like overfed geese in sleep, to assist with a mouthful of air the cooling process inaugurated by the water. None seemed disposed to encourage a thought or desire but that of restoring order in their devastated inner regions. The camels and dromedaries, following the example of the sober and dignified Merob, applied themselves to the pleasure of a refreshing draught with much more consideration than the men. Old Merob in particular was in a meditative mood. Between several long applications at the dripping mold he would cast furtive glances at Rachor, then look straight ahead with a distant stare, and lastly look intently for some time in the direction opposite Rachor's position, where the black guides

had piled up the luggage, with Merob's own basket at the bottom of the confusion. Merob must have had serious doubts of his own as to whether there was not more trouble ahead than they had left behind. His attentively poised ears could detect no sound coming from the fated litter that should have been alive with stirring and protesting. Something was out of joint, and Merob became ever more apprehensive.

Meanwhile Samma, whose small black eyes were almost sunken out of sight and whose flabby cheeks were puffed and reddened to the point of bleeding, had navigated over to the pile of reed boxes and skin bags that were lying in the sun as comfortable as the wet brood of a hen, just tossed together at random, and cautiously going down, first on one knee and then on the other, by the side of a stout and prosperous looking bag of oxhide, pulled and tugged undecidedly at its neckstring, opening wide the mouth of the dark pouch. The next instant he threw up his hands and in concert with Rahuel and a few others, who had watched his movements with an air of apprehension, exclaimed: "*Ruach Musri!*" to which Rahuel added solemnly alone: "Would that thou wert condemned to torment the entrails of Behemoth forever and ever!" and again turned and raised to his mouth the complacently squatting half-empty pail.

The thought of Aseneth was at last slowly filtering through the confusion of their bodily and mental anxieties. At least the growing regret on the faces of Rachor and Phares seemed to be the shadows cast ahead by a luminous lost remembrance. Also their puzzled looks and a rapid exchange of mistrustful glances told of the reawakening of their deepest con-

cern. Without a word of mutual agreement, both at the same time made their way to the spot where the basket of Merob showed a side from beneath the pile of bundles and packs, and both took hold of the corners together and pulled it clear. Then they paused. "Open it!" Rachor commanded.

"Not I," protested Phares. "It is your place to look after her!"

Rachor turned away, his eyes brimful of melted sorrow and repentance. "She is dead of course," he sobbed. "Let us bury her and then quit this land of evil."

But Rahuel had heard Rachor's wailing, and being less sensitive and more practical than many another man, quickly jerked off the cover and stooped over the basket. "Yea," he growled, "dead and stiff! And fixed up for burial! O *Ruach Musri*! It is the devil's own brew!"

Nathan came along, limping, and put his thin, hooked, inquisitive nose into the basket. He sniffed, but held his peace. Samma came lumbering, planted his hands largely on either side, looked, bent forward, and listened. "No more breath in thee, my good little maid," he commented thickly, and withdrew in the neighborhood of the big pouch which contained a jug of the ill-famed wine of Thebes.

The loss of Aseneth, as they all realized, meant for them the curse of their tribe and banishment from their home. This bitter thought in union with the ruin and ravages wrought by the excesses of yesterday's feasting, sufficed to break down the remnant of moral courage in their sore bosoms. Drooping in spirit and wilted in body, they surrounded the litter, scarcely daring to look upon the swathed and veiled form of

the comely child who had been the sole object of all their labor and care. It would have seemed a profanation for anyone to touch the body for the purpose of an examination, had anyone had the courage to risk looking upon the silent, pallid face, a standing reproach and a lasting source of remorse for her faithless guardians.

Slowly they sat down on the ground in a circle about the litter, with their faces turned away, and their backs towards the object of their sorrow. Slowly tears began to flow from many eyes and slowly Rachor intoned the customary lament for the dead in a low and trembling voice. Samma was the first to take up the weird strains, but amid yawning and mumbling. Rahuel remained silent. Some of the others also refrained from chanting for fear of injuring their unwieldy voices, made hoarse and heavy from the immoderate potations, and were content to add a grunt or groan now and then when either the solemnity of the chant or the pathos of the words affected them. Rachor and Phares acted as the chanters, improvising their text as they proceeded, while the rest were acting the chorus, repeating each verse of the leaders, once, twice, or more times, as it suited the sentiment expressed, but always with interesting variations of tone and measure.

In the course of the long and monotonous office, Samma dozed and droned and went to sleep, resting his head on his hands, which he held crossed over his knees drawn up close to his breast. Rahuel once irreverently arose and slunk to the well. But the interest of all flagged very perceptibly as the exercises were drawn out to the length of several dull hours. What added to the weariness was their internal empti-

ness, their hunger without appetite, and their thirst without satiety. It was evident that the threnody would end in a quarrel if Rachor would not soon bring it to a respectable close. But Rachor was neither blind nor insensible to his own internal sufferings, and shortly finished with a cry of pain, which was taken up by the whole chorus. It was a better expression of their feelings than a hopeless lament for the dead. Had the desert an echo, it might have been startled — and remained mute at that volcanic heaving of an inhumanly aggrieved human interior.

Rachor and Phares secured the cover of the basket with leather thongs and silently began to dig a hole with their swords. As many as could find room to work about the spot, fell to assisting the grave-diggers, throwing out the loosened ground with both hands until a depth of about eight feet had been reached. Then the basket was carefully and reverently lowered and the ground put back and heaped up over it so as to form a mound of considerable size at the foot of the palm tree beneath which "Aseneth" was put to rest. Phares cut and gathered some blooming vines and laid them on the "grave." But Rachor took out his dagger and cut into the bark of the tree the cross, the sacred symbol traced on the breast of the child. "She is laid away in darkness," he said hoarsely, his voice being heavy with sorrow and emotion. "May the Hope of Jacob live and sprout — and find a faithful keeper!" At the last words he struck his breast a resounding blow with his fist, and bent over to touch with his forehead the sacred emblem, the pledge of the favor of Heaven.



Chapter Twelfth

A CONSIDERATE WATCHMAN

THEMAN had lost no time in leaving the pastures of Jacob and the boundaries of Chanaan. He followed the course of the Jordan, passed the bleak shores of the Dead Sea, and rode on into Segor, where he made but a brief stop for the sake of his beasts. His men were hardy enough to outlast a ride of ten consecutive days, if necessary; but the beasts were subject to the necessity of eating and drinking, which they could not compensate by chewing and sucking a ragful of dried dates and figs, with which the men deceived clamorous nature. After five days of hard riding they entered the desert and pitched camp. They stood sorely in need of rest and repair and, therefore, remained a night and a day, sleeping, lounging, eating and drinking, before they would tempt the hot and inhospitable waste of sand to test their endurance and courage. But when they were fully restored to their barbaric prowess and animal vigor, they arose and pressed on, cheerful and boisterous, like a flight of crows after conducting the profitable burial of some victim of the hardships of the desert, and without mishap reached the northern "Wall of the Princes."

Joseph had been made the center of their interest from the time of his acquisition. His conduct on the

way had not failed to impress the uncultured vagabonds of the south with its humility and resignation, and especially with its reserve and modesty. It was a grateful experience to them to have in their midst, at their very elbows, a boy of so meek a disposition and so modest a manner. At home their boys were eager to reproduce with childish satisfaction the doings and sayings of their elders, and were careful to copy only those tricks and traits which for their lack of propriety attracted the attention of others, and in turn won the admiration of the unripe younger generation; as unprincipled living appeals more strongly to the impetuous boy than moderation and a sense of order.

Some had called Joseph "the virgin"; at first among themselves, and then with growing acquaintance also to his face. It had made him blush. But it was an honor from lips not much used to the sweetness of that name. And it was an honor well deserved, although neither sought nor even thought of. For Joseph appeared like one of a higher order of beings. At the last prolonged stop Theman had vested him with fresh garments of a make and material that might well have graced the daughter of a king. Theman had been selfish in his motive. His object was to preserve and enhance as much of the fine boy's natural handsomeness as could be brought under his care, and had himself been most agreeably surprised at the change produced in the appearance of the boy. It meant money for Theman.

After three days more of an arduous journey they came in sight of the northern walls. Here P'tehebra was in command, a man of rare rigor and righteousness for an Egyptian. But he was of the old stock, loyal

enough to the new sovereigns, although little proud of their methods of subjugating the country of his fathers. The old, staid, and stern order of things was slowly disintegrating under the easy hands of the Hyksos pharaohs, who readily mixed frivolity with their rule as well as with their worship. The deep-seated reverence for religion was departing, as rock-bottom convictions were forced to yield, like the columns of some massive temple, tottering and trembling by the moving apart of the foundations. P'tehebra had preserved the solidity of his convictions, both political and religious, amid an unceasing struggle against the pressure of the new mode of living. In this regard he was living among his people in isolation, like a hermit in the mountains. This isolation had made him cold in appearance and stern in fact. It kept his fervor harnessed, subdued, and damped, and often incited him to acts of severity bordering on cruelty, on account of the element of suppressed resentment mixed with his uncompromising rigor.

But the rigor of P'tehebra's administration at the Walls was somewhat mitigated by two circumstances. In the first place, the prince was passionately fond of the chase. His frequent excursions took him away from his post for days together, and because he selected as his companions those of his officers who were most in sympathy with his views, the post was often relieved of much of its silence, most of its dignity, and all of its gloom. In the second place, his lieutenant was an officer wholly in sympathy with the prevailing form of doing and dealing. He was one of the Hyksos circle of princes, an underling, it is proper to record, but yet one of the ruling class, the least among whom rated himself higher than the most exalted of the

ancient native noblemen. His name was Tem-nur, a short and terse reproduction of the man, who was nothing if not dissyllabic in appearance. His head was large, with the oval dropping decidedly at the occiput, which made it resemble the levers at the pumps weighted with a wooden block to balance the pail at the other end; for Tem-nur's mouth and chin were by no means a negligible quantity in figuring his facial proportions. The other prominent part of his physical make-up was his chest. It suggested at once the strutting peacock, the pouter pigeon, and the roaring lion. His arms and legs, on the contrary, were mere trifles; appendages, more or less useful, but surely not ornamental. His scattering limbs were long and slender and finely turned, his hands and feet as delicate and as prettily molded as those of a girl. He was by nature and profession a horseman; but whether that alone could account for his peculiarity of build, may as well remain a conjecture, in view of the fact that Tem-nur most conspicuously lacked the sense of brusk independence so natural in men trained for the equestrian art. He was a good-humored, hearty good-fellow, open to persuasions of any sort that pleased his tastes or filled his purse, and averse to nothing that entailed no risks and other discomforts.

One of these two was the man whom Theman was to face with his train and his slave. There was little reason for fear of difficulties if he faced either. Tem-nur was accessible from several directions, and P'tehebra so heartily despised slave-trading as an Oriental custom that he was always glad to let Theman pass so long as he could not lawfully cuff his ears. Slaves were much in demand in the busy country, and handsome boys especially were welcomed in every

house of pretensions from the Court down to the cabinet of her ladyship, the mistress of a royal cowherd. Interference, therefore, with the man who supplied so coveted an article was useless, and risky, to boot.

Yet Theman's mind began to work with an occasional hitch as he drew nearer and nearer the Wall. He knew who Joseph was. Nor was he ignorant of the good impression which Abraham had left in Egypt during his sojourn there two hundred years before. If it should leak out in any unforeseen way that his slave was of the blood of the noble old patriarch, P'tehebra would most eagerly avail himself of the opportunity of not only cuffing Theman's ears, but also of hanging him and all his followers along the crown of the wall as an ornament to Egyptian justice. There was no comfort in the thought.

He told Ephher, one of his few confidants, of his misgivings. "Make a girl of him," Ephher suggested as easily as if he had never thought of anything else during the whole long journey.

"But he will not tolerate it."

"Use the whip!"

"You are a fool, Ephher. It would make him talk much sooner than anything else."

"He will not talk, I assure you. He is too tame to betray us. He takes his lot as a portion of the providence of his life. He is a Hebrew — do not forget!"

"Then it is not necessary to disguise him."

"Indeed not; I was rallying you. Joseph makes a prettier show now in his new raiment than the comeliest of the dark damsels hereabout. Let him alone. A warning will be sufficient. Do not trouble your mind about him. I have something else on my mind that looks darker."

"Well?"

"The caravan of Rachor."

"But they entered at the lower gate."

"But they have probably been cast out again at the lower gate. Hent-ha-nur is not a man to let a fine Hebrew girl slip from his grasp. They should have brought down with them Reuben, or Juda, or any other of the sons of Jacob, for credentials and for effect. I myself would not pass so precious a morsel by without taking the risk of a bite."

Epher was not so well informed as his chief. The man knew why Reuben, or Juda, or any other of the sons of Jacob did not come down with Aseneth. But he did not think it necessary to enlighten his counselor.

"It seems best to me," he proceeded thoughtfully, "to represent the boy as my son at the Wall. It will save us long explanations before the suspicious P'tehebra and will not in any way spoil our chances of disposing of him in the city. On coming out we will pass through the lower gate, and when Hent-ha-nur counts noses according to our passport and discovers the leak, I will show him the receipt for the boy, whom the law entitles me to sell for the purpose of having him educated and instructed in the arts of the land. Of course he must not be entered on our passport as my *son* — by Ismael, our father! I would not have these cowherds think that I was selling my own flesh and blood!"

"Do as you please, master," Epher acquiesced, knowing the shrewdness of the old trader. "I shall instruct the men while you may have a heart-to-heart talk with the boy."

It was not the licensed slave dealer that was under ban in Egypt, but the kidnaper and the brigand,

who might want to profit by picking up and selling underhand, children and other desirable objects of the traffic in human flesh. The penalty for this crime was death by strangling with subsequent dismemberment of the body — a punishment abhorred by the Egyptians as precluding life and happiness beyond the grave and the prospect of a resurrection. Theman was licensed by the royal court. He had even at that moment a train of slaves under way by the sea route, which he was to meet at Memphis, after having disposed of his articles of luxury at the lesser markets along his course. The purchase of Joseph was merely incidental to this trip; a windfall, as is often cast into the lap of the ready-witted and daring. If Joseph held his peace there was nothing to fear. But if Joseph revealed his identity, it would be hard for twelve men in fine fettle to steer clear of the copper mines in Sina,¹ where the Egyptians kept a colony of malefactors at the state's expense, if they could at all escape the pressing invitation of the gallows.

Comfort in such musings? No. Theman was rather depressed when he at last halted his beast in order to let Joseph come up at his side. But the presence of Joseph instantly dispelled his uncomfortable mood. There was an *aura* of exceedingly gratifying fragrance about the boy, an emanation as of lilies and roses, but subtler still than the scent of flowers, so subtle that it captivated the heart without at the same time intoxicating the head and disturbing the senses. Theman puffed and sniffed with his native barbarous inexperience of finer sentiments than those produced by the tingling of the blood and the tickling of the flesh, and turned right and left in his saddle

¹ The Sinaitic peninsula.

with an effort, partly successful, at discriminating his uncompanionable feelings. His actions were much akin to those of a young cock pheasant preening, perking, and prancing for the admiration of a flock of inexperienced hens. He could not keep back from view his pleasure and satisfaction.

Joseph was not gaudily, but luxuriously attired. His nether garment was a tunic of byssus which reached from the throat to the feet. It was ample enough to break in a thousand little folds all over the upper body, and was gathered with a silver cord about the neck. Over this costly garment he wore a shorter coat of purple-dyed light wool, full, with wide sleeves, open from the throat down to the belt, but secured over the breast with tiny silver chains and reaching down to the knees. It was bordered with white wool at the sleeve openings, and at the hem. The outer garment consisted of a coarse linen coat, with a hard, glassy surface, to fend the dust and the rays of the sun. This sort of protection was universally affected by travelers in the desert.

But the charm of the boy's presence was centered in the arrangement of his headgear. His wistful, innocent face peeped like the heart of a rose from out and beneath a white turban and veil, the turban terminating in a moderate cone, and the veil flowing all about him and down the back and the shoulders, leaving free the luxuriant mass of brown hair that framed the clear brow and the fair cheeks and throat. The straight and sensitive nose, the brown eyes with their long, shady lashes, the arched eyebrows, and the delicately curved mouth made up a picture so attractive that Theman now could not but wonder that he himself had not also, as Ephraim had done long

before, conceived the idea that Joseph could more easily be passed through the gate as a king's daughter than as a son of any of the Chanaanite tribes.

Theman had fished out of a bag a pair of shoes of white leather, before the beast of Joseph came abreast of his own. Now he bent over, grasped one of the boy's feet, and slipped on a shoe, laced it, and unhanded the foot with a slight pat of affection. "The other!" he directed, ready with the mate. And Joseph pushed the other foot out from the entanglement of the coat. Thereupon the old pachyderm ostentatiously pressed a kiss on the shoe and proceeded to put it on the shapely foot. But the boy withdrew and, tapping his beast on the neck, rode on, perturbed and offended.

"Now let an old loon bethink himself of his manners," Theman blustered earnestly; for he could not understand such delicacy. "This fellow is softer than a kitten and daintier than a maiden, by a moon's journey. Wonder, will one of these cow-queens¹ tame him? He is off like an arrow at the touch of the finger. Heh, boy! Put it on yourself!" he cried, rode a little faster, and tossed the shoe into Joseph's lap.

A little more silent wondering on the part of the old merchant and the interview was begun. "Joseph, boy," Theman ventured with no little embarrassment, "the Gate is right over against us. There our wheat will be threshed. If you tell the jealous *Kelb*² at the gate that you are the son of Israel, *our* wheat will turn out to be hemp — you understand? — and *your* wheat will turn out to be a long gown wrapped around a dead boy, ten feet below the soil on which the green grass grows — you understand? I would never again buy

¹ Cow-queen: a term of reproach to a lady of estate; peculiar to Egypt.

² *Kelb*: dog.

you from your brothers, no, not even for a handful of mastix powder! But — listen, boy! — I would steal you, if I could not buy you, and if I were at home I would keep you in my own tent and among my own sons and daughters as one of them. Take your own interests to heart and keep still, or lie, if they become inquisitive. I will not sell you to anyone but who is a man of heart and who will educate you and make a man of you. Do you hear? You must not talk against me, as you love your life.”

Joseph had listened with bowed head. His eyes had moistened and his lips had quivered, but he had not yielded to his feeling of utter desolation at the prospect of being sold into a strange country; the memory of the cruel treachery of his brethren was too fresh to allow a thought of solace to soften his heart to weeping. “Have no fear of me,” he said slowly, raising his head without looking at Theman. “My lot is in the hands of the God of my fathers. Whatever He has decreed, shall come to pass. I shall not undertake anything to effect my liberation or to destroy you, but I humbly resign myself to the miseries which the treason of my brothers has brought upon my head. Do with me as pleases you: Only send a messenger to my father in Hebron to inform him that I am alive, lest he grieve himself to death.”

Theman nearly dropped from his high seat. The wonder of it! So young a boy and so wise! He rode along a great distance, through the narrow paths between the lagoons and marshes which were thickly grown with reeds of a man's height right and left, and over the rickety stone bridges, just thrown together for one day's passage across sluggish and brackish waters alive with hungry reptiles and swarming with

gnats and beetles of ferocious disposition. Theman took no notice of the dangers and discomforts of the way; his heart was in his mouth and his eyes were upon that handsome, strange, and elfish boy.

At last they rode up to the closed gates. Theman took up his ram's horn and sounded a signal, blowing three weird blasts three times in succession. The signal was answered from a turret within the wall, and slowly a dozen heads covered with quilted linen hoods, and as many tall spears, bobbed up quietly in an even line over the rough coping of the wall at both sides of the entrance. It was like the curiosity of fretting pigs at the sound of music; P'tehebra was surely not at the gate.

The dusty train entered, and Theman saluted Tem-nur with a gesture of familiarity grown out of long and pleasant acquaintance. "I have here a present for the governor," he drawled, shrewdly balancing his chances of exciting the cupidity of the lieutenant so much the more by pretending to show preferment to the superior officer as to the value of the gift.

"The prince is away on the chase," Tem-nur snarled, with ill-concealed envy.

"Then I request you to take charge of it and to deliver it to him on his return, with the assurance of my deepest respect and my sincerest appreciation of his friendship." He would certainly have hesitated to boast of P'tehebra's friendship had the governor been present. But he condescendingly handed down a bronze casket.

"May I inspect and admire your present to the prince, O son of Ismael?" asked Tem-nur, with tongue lolling from eager desire. He had before had proof of Theman's princely generosity.

"You may, son of Amen,"¹ the oily Midianite replied, "provided you bandage the eyes of your guards." This was a hint with the fist. The guards withdrew, and the merchants were left alone with the avaricious inspector.

It made no difference to Theman by whom his passport was countersigned, whether by the prince in person or by his lieutenant; only it was much easier to obtain the permission of entry from Tem-nur than from P'tehebra. Therefore, in order to insure speedy accommodation, he persisted in his trick of goading on the envy and avarice of the sub-inspector. He took back the casket, and turning the lock towards Tem-nur with a most expressive smile of gladness at so precious a possession, and with much circumstance explained the opening of the secret lock.

"At the side here you observe," he said quite leisurely, "a pin concealed beneath this slide" — he pushing the slide forward — "which pin is to be pressed hard inward with the little finger — by the way, your index finger is slender enough" — with a complimentary bow. "It releases the hooks of the lock, which can then be opened with the key." But meanwhile he had pushed back the pin and turned the key, and the lid of the box sprang open with a click. The Egyptian had grown pale from expectation, and when the sparkling contents were displayed before his eyes, he swayed and swung like a hose suddenly submitted to the pressure of filling. A look of indescribable longing flew into his face, his eyes rolled ecstatically, and he gurgled with a delight that stifled him: "Oh how splendid! The gems of Hal!" And he bent his face over the treasure box in mute rapture.

¹ Amen: Ammon, a heathen deity.

But the box was worth a good deal of the admiration of a vain and fastidious Egyptian. It contained a choice assortment of such trinkets and objects of daily use as the effeminate Egyptian deemed indispensable to the enjoyment of life. There gleamed a silver box filled with exquisite balsam from Gilead; a pair of gold-handled scissors for the grooming of the beard; a nail file with an engraved blade, of Hittite workmanship; a string of amber beads — a coveted necklace for a woman; a small wicker basket of the size of a man's fist, filled with emeralds from Persia, and with pearls of many colors and sizes; a pouch woven of silver and gold threads and lined with soft mole skin, bulging with aromatic frankincense; a flask of the fragrant ointment of Segor, and a handful of rings of chaste silver. Between these articles of luxury were set a respectable number of small trinkets, such as pendants for the adornment of the ears, necklaces from the jewelry shops of Sichem and Charchemish,¹ and hair-pins with heads of green, blue, red, and yellow gems.

Theman allowed the silent admirer a long time for inspection, and Tem-nur was fascinated beyond expression. Slowly he began to lay a soft finger upon this article and that, affectionately touching each in succession and clucking to himself like a hungry infant in delight over a newly filled nursing bottle. "Oh, oh!" he stammered a dozen times, reawakening from his trance; "is all this glimmer and glow and glory for the governor? It is the most brilliant gift that has ever been brought down from Asia. Oh happy man, to whom it is given to be the bearer and dispenser of such royal splendor and preciousness!" And at the instant he snapped the lid shut and, snatching the

¹ The capital of the Hittites.

casket from Theman's knees, pushed it under his own coat, where he clasped it tightly under his arm. Then he looked up at Theman with a decision that plainly said: "What can you do to make me give it to the governor?"

But Theman had no intention of doing anything useless. He winked at his followers to move on, and again turned towards Tem-nur, who asked blandly: "Have you no gift for the governor?"

Most assuredly Theman had a gift also for the governor! He handed down a roll of varicolored woolen cloth. "This is for the governor, my most honorable lord inspector," he said carelessly, as if he did not know that Tem-nur would also appropriate that trifle as a lawful perquisite of his office.


The subsequent inspection of Theman's wares consisted in a hurried glance over a list of the goods which he was carrying into the land. As Tem-nur had not counted the heads of Theman's companions, and Joseph's name had not been put on the inventory, all difficulties in that direction were obviated without a discussion. The inspector countersigned both the bill of lading and the passport for Theman and his entire train, and dismissed the wily old trader with a gracious wave of the hand and a happy smile, offering his heartiest good wishes for a prosperous journey. "May the hand of Amen be stretched out over you on all your ways!" he said, and retired to his quarters with his wealth.

"And may he make thee rich and happy!" Theman cried boisterously after him, but added in an undertone: "You elongated reproduction of a tadpole!" and departed in peace, to hasten after his caravan.



Chapter Thirteenth

DISTURBANCES

EM-NUR was not long left in undisturbed enjoyment of his precious acquisitions. Not much later than the middle of the afternoon a loud commotion arose at the gate, and when he hastened thither he was confronted by what he was pleased to call a pack of hungry jackals. He was irritated because of the rude interruption of his dreaming over his exceeding good fortune. But he became really anxious when he saw that in the midst of that disreputable "pack" was carried the lifeless form of an elderly man, whose breast was pierced by an arrow. The deathly missile was still sticking in the breast, the feathered end standing out stiffly right over the region of the heart.

The newly arrived wanderers from the desert were dumb and sullen. One of them, a man of larger than ordinary proportions, was sucking at his clenched fist and rolling his eyes and swaying his burly form amid stifled sobs and murmured curses. But he was doing nothing towards disposing of the body of his dead comrade.

The others, under one common impulse, together took hold of the body and mournfully bore it away on their hands to the shady rear of one of the sections of

the barracks. There they tenderly laid it down and knelt around it on the hot and hard flagging.

"What has happened?" Tem-nur demanded gruffly of the headman of that division of guards which was posted next the entrance.

The name of that headman was Assa. He was an Ethiopian, tall, well-knit, but gentle and loyal. At the unwonted harshness of his superior's voice he was taken aback and hesitated to answer. Tem-nur became enraged and advanced towards him with large strides, lifting up a hand as if to strike him in the face. But Assa stood immovable, with his bow pressed to his side and with one hand upon his quiver. And the quiet of the powerful man stopped Tem-nur in his advance.

"Assa, speak," he growled; "how has this man come by his death?"

Now Assa answered quietly: "As these men approached the gates, they commanded us to open for them. We inquired after their mission. They shouted back at us that they were poor wretches, starving, homeless, plundered of all their possessions, and banished from their homes. We ordered them away, as the law forbids us to admit vagabonds and criminals. Then they hurled stones at us and cursed us and called us cowardly adorers of the cow.¹ We let loose an arrow or two upon them and struck their leader whose conduct was the least offensive. Then some made ready in their madness to scale the gates, and I thought it wiser to open the gates in order to avoid more bloodshed. They were quieted instantly when we let them have their will."

¹ The worship of Apis was then not yet in vogue. But the cow had long been made an object of special veneration, both in Egypt and in the Chaldees, and was sacred to the goddess Hathor.

The men crouching around their dead companion presented a pitiful sight. They were haggard as wintry willows and apparently insane from privation. There was but one among them, a man of tall and slim stature, who, although squatting like the rest, did not beat his forehead on the pavement as the others did with desultory wailing and cursing. He sat bolt upright, with his head bowed low into his hands. He trembled and shivered, but that might be due to a ravaging fever in his veins. From time to time he uttered a word, ever with the same intonation of mingled horror and wrath. Tem-nur bent his ear towards him and caught the sound. "Ruach Musri" was the dreadful refrain of the man's smothered ravings.

"They must not remain here at the gate," Tem-nur protested, softening perceptibly. "Take the dead man from them and bury him, and conduct the others into the sheds that they may rest themselves and give an accounting of their plans."

But this was reckoning without the host. At hearing these orders the dispirited group set up a concerted howling that aroused even the sympathy of the large and savage dogs from Konobos, confined in a shed nearby. "Who are you, then," Tem-nur snarled frightened, "and what do you seek here at the Walls?"

Thereupon the chanter of the "Ruach Musri" arose, a stately figure, as perfect as any statue of the great pharaohs of the past, although rather thin from famishing, and taking a few steps towards the inspector, pathetically stretched out his arms, spreading his fingers wide apart, and raised his head and eyes towards heaven. In this pose he remained a little while, silent and stiff, not knowing what to proffer first as an effective

introduction. Then his parched and cracked lips parted, and with a smack his mouth opened, his position remaining unchanged, and he panted: "Who are we? Dogs we are! Fools we are! Hyenas we are! Traitors we are!"

After that spurt he stopped for breath and dropping his arms, turned his face full upon Tem-nur. "We are victims of the *Ghost of Egypt*," he resumed, a little more rationally; "we have bartered the hope of our lives for a score of jugs of poisoned wine. We have not been living since; we have been dying every day, and all day long, and through the horrible nights, ever since we have steeped our souls in that dreadful wine. And we are come to seek rest in the shadow of thy face, O powerful P'tehebra!"

"Mistake!" Tem-nur cried; and before he could explain his meaning the other had already interpreted it to the effect, that they were mistaken in seeking rest in that part of the country, and had made a savage clutch at Tem-nur's throat. But Tem-nur had sprung back, not having from the beginning had much confidence of peaceable intentions on the part of his haggard visitors.

"Keep your distance," he shouted at the maniac, "and tell us of what tribe you are!"

"We are Hebrews," the other replied, relapsing into his former suppressed raving, "and my name is Rahuel. Our dead leader was Rachor. His substitute is Phares. That fat ox is Samma. That weasel is Nathan. That bow-legged ram is Obed; that long-bearded goat is Omri, and the rest are as good or as bad with names as without names. But fools are we all. We came down to Egypt a fortnight ago with a daughter of Israel, the shepherd king of Hebron and Jericho. She was to be

delivered to P'hotepra, the highpriest at On. She was taken away from us by a band of Midianites. We were made the guests of Hent-ha-nur. We were starved and parched, and ate and drank like lost oxen in the wilderness of Sodom. While in the toils of the wine we were carried out to a distant oasis. The girl was found dead. She is buried. We want rest!"

"She is buried — we want rest!" assent came like a soft but earnest echo from the dejected group.

Assa had followed every word of Rahuel's statement with closest attention. Now he was eying his superior with puzzled looks, and shifted his position so rapidly that he appeared to be dancing, and attracted Tem-nur's curiosity.

"How now, Assa?" Tem-nur inquired nervously; for Assa seemed indeed to be infected with Rahuel's madness.

"I should like to ask this man how that girl, that daughter of Israel, met her death," Assa replied hastily and in gulps. He had more to ask than that.

"Ask him," Tem-nur consented, not only relieved, but more nearly disappointed, by the archer's simplicity.

"She was dead when we found her in her litter after our beastly debauch," Rahuel volunteered.

"Who put the dead body in the litter?"

"I do not know, nor does anyone else."

"But he who put her there must know."

"She may have been smothered, or starved — Oh do not press me," Rahuel exclaimed. "It is too wicked to conceive!"

"What?"

"That Hent-ha-nur should have killed her!"

"How did she fall into the hands of Hent-ha-nur?"

"We overtook the kidnapers at the southern gate and slew them, every man of them; but at that time the girl was not with them."

"Do you think that the wise and gentle Hent-ha-nur would put the girl in charge of a band of drunkards such as you were on the day of your mishap?"

"Ay, son of the night," Rahuel answered, with sudden sobering, out of the depths of his soul, "you are cruel, but you are right. We buried a dummy!"

At that word every one of the sorrowful group sprang to his feet and shouted at the top of his voice: "We buried a dummy!"

But Assa continued undisturbed: "I do not believe that you buried the girl at all events; for I have seen her."

Surprised "Ah's" and "Oh's", and then, stupid silence.

"A troop of Midianites under the lead of Theman passed these gates this morning. Among the men I distinctly noticed a girlish face and figure which was carefully guarded from view by the merchants' thronging about her. And she was a Hebrew maiden, if I know my own mother."

This was implicitly accusing Tem-nur of neglect. But that official had become so interested that he overlooked the bold charge and pressed Assa to proceed.

"The band who stole the girl from us was a section of Theman's hordes," Rahuel added to the report of the zealous Ethiopian.

"Theman's toll has never been so rich as today," Assa proceeded, with less security and firmness than before; "it was a bribe — !"

But he could not finish his flaying of the neglectful Tem-nur; his speech was stopped short with sharp

orders to return to the barracks. Assa obeyed, and with his band of dusky archers withdrew to the guard-house. The sentinels closed the gate and, upon directions from their chief, hustled the Hebrews together with the dead Raehor into one of the sheds, the folding doors of which he closed and bolted.

Tem-nur had rather felt than calculated the drift of Assa's disclosures and the consequences sure to arise from his own neglect. If he had allowed Theman to smuggle a slave who had been picked up along the road, it was worth his head to bring Theman to book. Hence he called out a dozen of his fastest riders, sprang on the back of a frisky young dromedary, and with his troop sped away along the road of the caravans in pursuit of the old fox.

Four hours later they returned with Theman and his "slave." Meanwhile the Hebrews had been refreshed, but had not been released. They could not be trusted on account of their ungoverned, violent temper. The recovered "slave," in the person of Joseph, was presented to them for identification through a crack between the doors of their prison, each in turn coming up and curiously looking over the handsome, sad-faced captive. But as the first glance told them that he could not be their tiny ward, they shook their heads in disgust and walked away, sighing and murmuring curses on the head of the hard-hearted "governor." None recognized the son of Jacob. "Our ward is a little girl of ten years," Phares explained to Tem-nur, "whereas this maid — if maid it be — is at least sixteen years old."

Then Theman was subjected to a strict hearing.

"Your papers," Tem-nur said coldly, "your papers show that you are bound for Memphis, to the High House. Is your bond-maid destined for the pharaoh?"

"But I have no bond-maid with me, good man," Theman countered with a laugh.

"Then if this slave of yours is a free maiden, why is she found without fatherly protection among a band of merchants? Where are her servants and her companions?"

"My good friend, you are troubled about many things without cause. This is not a free maiden."

"Now, neither bond-maid nor free maiden: is she the wife of one of your men?"

"No, my shrewd Tem-nur; she is not even a bride. Now make a good guess and tell me which of us all would deserve to have so pretty a dove for a wife?"

"Not *you*, of all!" laughed Tem-nur, who could not long sustain a serious tone. "You are as gray as a wolf and would make a poor mate for so neat a kitten."

This was what Theman had been aiming at: to dispel the evil official mood of the "elongated tadpole." He opened his wide mantle and pushed both hands into a belt, playfully tossing a mass of jingling trinkets, taking out a handful and letting them drop back upon the others like sparkling drops of gold and silver from his fingers. Tem-nur's old passion was revived, and he watched the wealthy trader with envious eyes.

"Those 'neat kittens,'" Theman drawled, "are so plentiful in the hills of the Hauran and Bashan that each of us can afford to coddle three or four at a time. You know that Abraham took unto himself Hagar, an Egyptian bond-maid, besides Sarah, the wife of his bosom. Hagar's son was Ismael, and Ismael is our father. It is a privilege inherited from the fathers for us to be partial to more wives than one."

"Bah," Tem-nur pouted; "it is bad taste! Privi-

lege? Ka-Khepr!¹ How can a man love two good women at once! And if one is good and the other is not, then may I never be buried if I can understand."

"But if the two love him equally well?"

"Then both are not worth a fig. A good woman wants to have her lord all to herself. At least our women are much given to jealousy. What is this you are toying with?" he concluded, pointing an unsteady finger at the stout belt.

"Oh, nothing much," snorted Theman carelessly; "only trash and trifles, such as we love to put around the necks and arms and ankles of our 'kittens'"; where-by he made a big grab and, extracting the well-filled hand, raised it up and held it outspread with its store of glittering nothings under the eyes of the covetous official.

"Take them," he said encouragingly. "They may be fit adornment for your own 'neat kitten,' or may serve to procure one for your tent."

Joseph's name, however, was entered as a new item on the lists of both the trader and the governor. "Is-Sephela"² the mysterious legend read in both documents, and that ended the episode of Theman's entry for that expedition.

¹ "Ghost of a bug!" An exclamation of contempt.

² "Man from Sephela," a town near the coast of the Mediterranean in ancient Chanaan, southeast of Joppa. The name is sufficiently similar to the Egyptian for *Joseph*.





Chapter Fourteenth

P'TEHEBRA

FROM the day that the "Hebrews" had left the place of the burial of "Aseneth" and of their tearful and fearful recovery from the ravages of the execrated "Ruach Musri," they had continued their journey northward towards the "Walls of the Princes" without further mishap. They had passed their time in sullen brooding, except for the frequent sallies of mutual accusations and imprecations. The spirit of unity and harmony, which had not even from the beginning of their joint mission been much in vogue among them, had entirely gone to pieces on this last and bitterest turn of their excursion into the strange land of the south. Rachor especially had cruelly nursed his despair by gloating over and rehearsing their misfortune until it was plain to all that it had settled on his soul as dark as night. Even the solicitude of Phares in trying to banish the deadly gloom which was enshrouding them had been laughed to scorn by the disaffected old man.

"Who knows," Phares had suggested, "but that by the decree of the Almighty the child is better bestowed among the dead than among these born idolaters? Aseneth was at all accounts one of the pure whose home is in Heaven with the angels."

But Rachor had replied with bitter irony: "It is a

consolation for us to know that she had to be made an angel by her guardians. And what joy shall it not be for Jacob to hear that we have paved her the way to her glory by our frivolous contest with the wine jugs of the Egyptians! Silence —!" he was wont to scold, when Phares essayed to submit one circumstance or another, such as their starvation, or their inexperience, in extenuation of their guilt. Since he had suffered the loss of his ward, Rachor would no longer tolerate interfering with his grief.

In the course of a few days the two leaders had become so estranged that they would ride side by side for long hours together without exchanging words, or looks, even only out of curiosity. Their followers were soon infected with the disheartening example and rode on gloomily like a troop of malefactors on their way to the gallows. At last they even neglected to stop and camp together, scattering as they did, in pairs, or groups of three and four, and resting and camping as they might select without regard for anyone else. It was only at the end of the journey that they again gathered around the implacable Rachor.

His interior isolation had stamped his face with a repulsive hardness and had effected a disagreeable change in his general appearance. His hair and beard and eyebrows had turned white in a week, his skin had become yellow and hard as parchment, and his pose was that of an eagle dying in distress. His voice was harsh and loud and fretful, and his speech was uttered in short, cutting sentences, like the screeches of the eagle fretting over the fatal arrow in its breast. And although he had in his demand for admission at the gate not made use of offensive words, yet he had been singled out by the archers as the one least worthy

to live on account of his apparent despair and his hostility toward the living.

For the present no disposition could be made of the prisoners. It was the usual policy of the governor at the "Walls" neither to permit a troop of unidentified foreigners to enter the land nor to let them return into the desert before they had been subjected to a most rigorous investigation. The "Walls" were the sore spot in the eastern boundary line which was a standing temptation to the Asiatic chieftains to descend upon and pillage the fat pastures and the granaries of the Delta.

P'tehebra returned in a few days from his hunting trip, and being informed of the capture of a troop of suspected strangers, immediately took in hand the matter of settling their fate. Rachor had been buried with as much ceremony as the curious Egyptians would permit. His grave had been dug outside the wall and was marked with a cone-shaped burial chamber in miniature, as an imitation of the domestic burial vaults. It was an honor which an Egyptian would withhold from none that died in his sacred land. Egypt was in the habit of showing more respect to the dead than to the living.

P'tehebra was a handsome man. Not far past the middle age, he bore every mark of noble breeding and culture clearly expressed both in his features and in his manner. His beard and the hair of his head were black with the luster of fine silk, and his complexion, much lighter than that of the Hyksos conquerors, was of a light brown, like the color of the wheat tintured with a suffusion of the roseate. He was a noteworthy representative of the old princely families who had been the rulers of Egypt before the

disastrous invasion from Chanaan, and many of whom were still living and thriving and—plotting, in the Upper Land, whence they had never been dislodged.

His position as the governor of the Nether Province and as the “watchdog” at the Walls gave him neither pleasure nor pride. But his fathers had been retained in the service of the new government as a special mark of royal favor for their undoubted honesty and integrity, and his own son Pent-Amen had been called to the “High House” to wait upon the pharaoh in person as his chief butler. Had P’tehebra not had the welfare of his son so much at heart he would have preferred to return to the Upper Land and to cast his lot with the remnants of his own subjugated people. For his family had been transplanted from the Arp-hesep, where rebellion was ever ready, to the Nether Land in order to separate these most powerful of the native princes from the restless circle which would hardly attempt to strike a telling blow without a leader of the acknowledged intrepidity of the dukes of the Arp-hesep. Many revolutions had been enacted; but it was like the soldiering of young boys: a good deal of noise, of rattle and clatter, without issue, except that the toy warriors had relieved themselves of their desire to put on exhibition their courage, in union with their disapproval of the existing government. These flashes of popular wrath were always dampened with a flood of uselessly spilled blood. Yet the kings knew that their person would be no safer among these indefatigable intriguers than in the jaws of a lion. The one thing they lacked for making a decided success of their armed demonstrations was a capable, an experienced, leader. Hence in the course of time

the kings had granted them home rule, and were at times persuaded to go so far in their indulgency with the untamable rebels as to remit their contributions to the royal treasury — mainly because they could not enforce them except at the point of the sword. The question of how long it would take to inflame the populace also with their fanatical patriotism was to the pharaohs at Memphis a source of interminable anxiety.

P'tehebra had several times repulsed the unruly tribes, who sat with hungry eyes on the boundary of the desert opposite, and had even withstood the hostilities of several Asiatic tribal kings, one of whom had descended upon the "Garden of Egypt" with an army of several thousand trained and tried archers and lancers. At that time P'tehebra had summoned his whole army of ten thousand men into the field. But his well equipped and loyal army had long been a thorn in the side of some of the jealous Hyksos princes of the neighborhood, who gained the pharaoh's ear for their malicious whisperings. "P'tehebra has formed that large body of men into a harmonious engine of war," they sniffed, "in order to have a footstool to stand upon when he raises his foot to ascend the royal throne." And the combination of circumstances lent color to their insinuations, for the governor's army was so well fed and kept, and so well disciplined by the tireless efforts and limitless patience of its chief, that it was probable enough, as was noised about the palace, "the soldiers could be more easily turned to striking for the governor against the king than for the king against the governor." The pharaoh's confidence was ultimately undermined, and just at the moment of the impending clash with the Chal-

dean hosts, P'tehebra received the royal decree which relieved him of his post and summoned him to appear before the "High House."

At that time the head of the army of Memphis was one of the intimate friends of the pharaoh, a man beyond the shadow of suspicion of disloyalty, a Hyksos prince, who had little regard for the nobles of the old line on account of their constant scheming and intriguing. When, therefore, the pharaoh received P'tehebra and under cover of good-will offered him the office of the royal butler — the degradation of the offer of wig and bottle in place of sword and buckler made P'tehebra turn pale with scorn — P'tehebra protested his willingness to serve the king in any capacity, but alluded to the threatening dangers in the north. "There is need up in the 'Garden' of a man of courage and experience," he had pleaded. And the king had suspiciously inquired "whom he considered the best man for the place." "None but the governor of Memphis," P'tehebra had assured the king, knowing that he himself was no more to be considered. But thereupon the king arose from his throne, and in sight of all his officials and courtiers, some of whom were among the traducers of P'tehebra, embraced him, and taking off his own golden neck chain, put it around P'tehebra's neck. "Go back to your soldiers," the king ordered him kindly, and added with a look of displeasure at some of the bewildered witnesses: "And the man who again shall dare to misuse your name shall forthwith pay the penalty of his treason with his head." A little later the king had offered the stewardship to P'tehebra's eldest son, who had no leaning towards the rough game of war.

When he returned from the chase, P'tehebra called

his lieutenant Tem-nur for an immediate accounting before he laid aside his hunting garments. "I met a train of Midianites on my way home," he began sternly, as soon as the inspector had reported the incidents connected with the detention of the Hebrews. "They had a maid in their midst, whom I suspected to be a capture of Theman. But their papers were viséed and sealed by you, and I allowed them to pass on, despite my misgivings."

"That maid is one of Theman's various companions of comfort and ease," Tem-nur explained rather diffidently. "I held him up for the sake of her; but the Semites do not live according to the customs of other people. He maintains that he has a right to carry with him as many wives as he may please."

"Whether that companion of the old fox be a maid or not I do not know — that *companion* is surely not his wife. You might as well try to persuade me that a humming bird can be mated to an owl. But we may learn more from the prisoners."

He dismissed Tem-nur with a slight gesture of the hand which lacked the grace of friendliness and was purely official. The Hebrews were detained in the pen until evening. After sundown P'tehebra ordered that the whole troop be brought before him for scrutiny. When they had filed into his chamber of inquisition, and Phares had been indicated to him as their leader and spokesman, he addressed himself freely to the latter, as a man without prejudice, both willing to hear the truth and ready to protect the innocent.

"From the documents of the Gate I learn," he began, looking deep into Phares' eyes, "that you assert to have brought down a daughter of Jacob to

be delivered to P'hotepra in the temple of On, and that she was violently taken from you, and that now she is dead. Is this statement true before the eyes of the All-seeing Wisdom?"

Phares was for the moment struck dumb with joy and wonderment at the last words of the governor, whom he had held to be a heathen ignorant of the old traditions of the East. The "All-seeing Wisdom" was a title of the sun, the popular idol of Egypt. But the sun would not be called upon to be a witness to the truth of a saying; for how could it penetrate into the hearts of men?

"Praised be the all-holy God of our fathers," Phares exploded after a pause, and stretched out his arms towards P'tehebra. "He hath deigned to make the splendor of His Countenance to rise over thee! We have said what we know to be true and not otherwise, O great P'tehebra."

Then Phares recounted with minute details the incidents of their entire journey. But he sensitively passed over in silence their debauch in the Gate of Hent-ha-nur and presented their story in such a manner that it seemed as if they had not been the guests of the southern Gate at any time. "And now," he concluded eloquently, "we are exiled from our home and country. The curse of Jacob would cling to our heels until the last of us were extirpated with all his kith and kin. Therefore, we pray thee, let us enter into this land that we may live and prosper and establish a tent for those who may come down after us out of our families. Thy land is wide and wealthy and we gladly offer our hands to multiply its wealth and to extend the area of its fertility."

But eloquence was lost upon P'tehebra. "How

could it be," he temporized, "that so many brave men did not prevent the death of a little girl?"

Phares was discouraged at the dilatory methods of the governor. He had expected to obtain instantly the desired permission. "I do not know," he answered confusedly. "We found her dead one morning, and buried her. What else could we do for her?"

There was no logic in this explanation, and P'tehebrea pressed his question. "Was she suffocated?" he persisted.

"It is possible, but I do not believe it; unless someone should have wrapped her so tightly into her garments that she could not free herself. But who should commit so terrible a crime?"

"The Egyptian guard," one of the breathless bystanders blustered, and Phares changed color. But the prince was visibly surprised at the unexpected information.

"Step forward!" he ordered the speaker. "Who was that guard?"

But the wretched man, who had seen the terror in Phares' blanched face, refused to answer with the stubbornness of his race. He had at once understood that he had spoiled his leader's story and had thereby endangered both Phares' and their own safety. He left it to Phares to extricate them from the desperate situation.

"You need not fear," P'tehebrea continued stiffly. "I noticed from the beginning that the tale of your leader lacked consistency. If he has told a tale only incomplete and not also untrue, depend upon my grace. And if any Egyptian has dealt unjustly by you, he shall repay you a hundredfold. Speak!"

"Speak!" Phares also commanded him, crushed and annihilated by his misfortune.

At last the tattler stepped forward and related all that Phares had omitted in so far as he could recall the happenings of that fateful day of the *Ruach Musri*. He admitted without hesitation that none of them was in a condition to entertain the slightest concern about the safety of their ward, and confessed that his accusation of the Egyptian guard was founded solely upon his own suspicions.

Now P'tehebra was jealous of the reputation of the military, whether they served under him or under any other commander, and his ire arose. "Suspicion, my friend," he snapped. "is the reason of a knave to accuse an honest man." He had himself had a galling experience of knavery of that sort. "I should rather believe that the girl is safe, but that she has fallen into greedy hands. How old is she?"

"Ten years," the Hebrew answered absent-mindedly.

P'tehebra cast a look of relief upon Tem-nur, who had followed the hearing with utmost anxiety. There was no longer any doubt that the kidnaped girl and Theman's victim, whoever "she" might be, were not identical.

"You should have told me the whole truth from the start," P'tehebra lectured Phares. "Then you would have obviated this inquiry and the disgrace of your cowardice. I will send word to Hent-ha-nur to search for the child. Within four or five days we shall have news from him. Tem-nur, make out the passports for the relay post. These few days you may tarry here and be my guests."

He arose, and was about to dismiss them in the custody of his lieutenant, when Rahuel shook a hand over his head at P'tehebra and shouted derisively:

"Have we not told our whole tale to your muddle-headed subaltern here" — pointing at Tem-nur. "He should have booked our story as we told it. We are not cowards! Remember this, ye kings of cow-pens!"

Rahuel was boiling with rage and made a lunge at Tem-nur. The prince beckoned to the guards who were posted around his seat. "Bind the fools," he cried disgustedly, "and lock them up in the central detention shed! We will give them ample time to learn manners."

His order was executed with some difficulty. But another troop of guards being called by Tem-nur, the troublous Rahuel also was overpowered and bound hands and feet, ready for the prison.






Chapter Fifteenth

REVELATIONS

LATE in the night a watchman was sent out by P'tehebra with a curious old lamp consisting of a bronze frame and a bronze fuel bowl. The frame was brought together at the top in the shape of a cupola, and the four sides, which consisted of perforated plates of bronze, were inlaid with amber eyes, through which filtered the intense but steady and restful glow of the oil flame imprisoned inside. The whole strange contrivance was constructed to rest between the outstretched wings of a crane or an ibis of greenish metal. The bill of the bird served as a handle, and the legs and claws, turned in on the body of the figure, served for the feet of the lamp.

P'tehebra had removed the lamp from a small, neatly carved and lavishly decorated altar, where it had reposed before the bronze door of a miniature fane. Here, after the watchman was gone, P'tehebra touched a secret spring and opened the door. Inside that costly case was set up on a silver tripod a silver bowl, which was surmounted by a hemispherical silver cover of the same shape as the top of that lamp, but ornamented with a crest of the shape of the sacred *Ankh*.¹  He reverently took out the cup, uncov-

¹ The symbol of life and immortality.

ered it, bowed over it and, touching his lips to it, sipped a drop of the amber-colored liquid with which it was half filled. "For the drinking of immortality from the fountain of life," he murmured, bowed again, covered the cup, and replaced it. Then he snapped the door shut and withdrew to a seat at the side of the shrine, his eyes expectantly fixed on the door of the somber chamber.

As the watchman proceeded from the governor's quarters, which were a stately mansion surrounded by a sixfold circle of solemn old palm trees and crio-sphinxes, with all manner of shade trees, fruit trees, and shrubbery strewed between the legs of these giants, he passed the sentinels right and left, and the patrols, who all stood still in respectful attention at sight of the mysterious lamp. Neither challenge nor protest was voiced, and only after the lamp had disappeared, the watchful guardians of P'tehebra again quietly went about their various duties.

The watchman stopped at the shed where the Hebrews were locked up. He drew the bolts of the heavy doors, entered, and, after looking over the sleepers, cut Phares' bonds, aroused him, and bade him come with him. The comrades of Phares were not disturbed; they enjoyed to the full this first quiet rest after their harrowing experiences of the last two weeks.

Phares was not a little frightened. But he arose and followed his guide without a word of doubt or distrust; he was so chastened by the late reverses as to be resigned and to submit to any disposition that might be made of him and his followers. He even refrained from seeking information on the way to the headquarters of P'tehebra, which he soon understood to be the object of this interruption of his rest. Arriv-

ing at the door, he was ushered into the presence of the stern governor. P'tehebra was alone, and the watchman, having placed the lamp in the governor's hands, silently withdrew to his post outside the house.

"Do you know this light?" P'tehebra asked of Phares without much ado.

Phares shook his head as much in admiration of the amiable tone of the governor as in astonishment at the air of reverence that pervaded the chamber.

"Have you not a sacrifice in your worship of the Supreme Being?" P'tehebra continued.

Phares was again about to shake his head, but bethought himself and replied slowly and meditatively: "Abraham, our father, offered his son on the altar of fire to the Most High; but the Most High accepted the good-will and the faith of Abraham for a sacrifice and returned the boy to the bosom of his father."

"Have you not a common and public sacrifice?"

"No; but we have a common and personal sacrifice, the purification of the flesh by circumcision."

"Circumcision is common among the enlightened and purified of all nations. It is not a sacrifice; it is a ceremony more useful to us than honorable to the Ruler of the Heavens. Have you not heard of the sacrifice of Noah?"

"Who has not heard of that, O mighty Prince? But it was not enjoined on his posterity as an act of worship."

"I do not mean the sacrifice offered after the delivery from the flood, but that which was offered by Noah before and during the flood as a remembrance and continuation of the sacrifice of Enoch, the patriarch of the children of God and the author of worship by sacrifice. Have you no knowledge of it?"

Phares again thoughtfully shook his head. "I have heard from my father's father, who was among the servants and warriors of Abraham, that on their return from the pursuit of the five kings they were met by Melchisedech, then king of Uru Salem, who offered bread and wine to the Almighty as a thanksgiving for victory. They were much mystified, the sire used to recall with awe, at the sacred ministration. However, it has not passed into common use among Abraham's children. But I now remember," he continued with some animation, "that my sire often spoke of a like ceremony performed by the nations of the Land of the Twain Rivers and of the Highlands of the 'Rest of the Ark,' which was claimed by them to be an imitation of the offering of Noah and of Enoch. But I do not recall its name."

"Homa?" P'tehebra suggested eagerly. "Haoma? Hom?"

But Phares remained unenlightened.

"Soma?" again submitted P'tehebra.

"Som-a, Sem?" — Phares was meditating. "Yea," he cried at last, so loud that P'tehebra motioned to him with a hand to be guarded. "Yea," he repeated guardedly; "was not the first-born of Noah named after the sacrifice of Enoch, the Man of God? But this remembrance is of things so antique and vague that I must be pardoned for not having them at the tip of my tongue. It was nearly lost among the sons of Sem when they built the Great Tower and were scattered thence over the face of the earth."

"But it was not lost among the sons of Japhet," P'tehebra enthusiastically assured him, rising from his seat. He set aside the lamp and opened the shrine. Then he pulled Phares alongside by the sleeve

of his coat and showed him the sacred bowl. "This is the sacrifice of Noah," he whispered, "as inherited from the sons of Japhet through Jima, the first king of their race. And the crest on the arc of the cup is the seal of Jima, the emblem of justice and peace and redemption. It is but a shadow; but it is a shadow of the great Light of which the Almighty shall unbosom Himself for the readmission of the children of men unto His own fatherhood. It is the commemoration of the Tree of Life."¹

Phares, looking more closely, recognized the crest. Instantly he began to tremble, and his breath failed him for a moment. "It is the sign of Joseph and of Aseneth!" he gasped, and turned his dismayed eyes on P'tehebra.

"Who are Joseph and Aseneth?" the governor inquired anxiously.

"Joseph is the son of Israel —"

"Ay," P'tehebra interposed, "the boy of the wonderful dreams?"

"The same; and Aseneth is the girl whom we were to deliver to the priests of On. Both bear this mark of heavenly selection on their breasts from their mother's womb."

"How has that Moabite, Rahuel, found a place among the servants of Israel?"

"His father is of our tribe, but his mother is a daughter of Moab, who was wooed by the unfortunate Repha for her exceeding beauty. Do not burden us all, O Prince, with the wickedness of his tongue! He is a man of courage and daring, a man of the wooded mountains, who can turn wood into any shape useful for the needs of man. But he is as smooth as the ser-

¹ See the visions of Bl. Catherine Emmerich and *Hom.*

pent, as unruly as the wild ass, and as prone to wrath as the wild ox. Pardon me and my brethren, O Prince, and let us go our way!"

"Whither?" P'tehebra inquired kindly, yet not without a trace of uneasy expectancy.

"Down to the Garden¹ of Mizraim," Phares replied, full of the hope of a gracious answer. "Stake off for us a parcel of the land and we shall be as loyal to you as the flock are to their shepherd."

"And what shall be done with Aseneth?"

"As you have said, O gracious Prince, the child must be safe in the hands of Hent-ha-nur, and you yourself have promised to take charge of her. Why should we, then, a small band of strangers, undertake to conduct her through this land, where we may meet with new pitfalls at every turn?"

The wealth of Egypt, the abundance of the good things of earth, the opulence manifest everywhere, even here at the gate of the desert, must have turned the avaricious minds of these men, who had descended from a country that offered little better to them than their sustenance, and that amid conditions which made their life and labor an incessant warfare against the numerous hostile tribes among whom they were confined like prisoners — at large, but under strict surveillance.

The honest Egyptian, whose ideals stood at a respectable height above the soil, disdained the sordidness of a greed that could barter the honor of a scrupulous execution of so sacred a mission for material gain and bodily comfort. He eyed Phares sorrowfully for a little while and then said curtly: "I will free you and your party from your bonds; but I will

¹ The Delta of the Nile (*Goshen*).

detain you until I have brought to light the fate of Aseneth — of *Aseneth*," he repeated painfully, "of her who is marked with the seal of the Almighty. Have you any papers to prove her identity?"

"The papers are with Rahuel," Phares answered, with much dejection and disappointment.

"Bring them to me in the morning. I must present them to my brother Hent-ha-nur, would I obtain the release of the precious ward of the priests from him."

P'tehebra softly struck a metal disk with a rod. The watchman reappeared, took the lamp from his master's hand, and conducted Phares back to the pen. In the morning the prisoners were freed from their bonds, but were still kept in confinement. Through the crack of the doors they saw P'tehebra mount and depart with a troop of his faithful huntsmen for his all-important visit at the southern Gate. Before he gave the signal for the start, the prince turned to Tem-nur with the brief and sober direction: "Treat them as our guests; also the Moabite. I shall take him to task on my return. Keep a strict watch over them, but do not resort to the whip."

Rahuel heard those words of censure aimed at himself and was infuriated. He sprang at the doors, trying hard to pry them open with his hands and shaking them so that they rattled in their hinges like a chariot in the heat of battle. But the Egyptians were masters of the art of securing their prisoners, few though those were that enjoyed life even in prison after judgment. The summary process was considered more economical and less open to the blandishments of sentimentality, and in consequence, to reconsiderations, pardons, and the evil influence of bad example on the masses.

Rahuel raged in vain. P'tehebra heard the noise and quitted the rebellious demonstration with a grim smile. He seemed to be a man outwardly made of cold iron and inwardly filled with molten fire; his very breath was hot with his sense of duty, and with his will and might to do his duty. He did not stop to listen whether Rahuel was again delivering himself of a quantity of customary abuse: one lapse was sufficient in the eyes of the rugged chieftain to set the scales of justice immovably on retribution. Rahuel no longer existed for P'tehebra, except as an implacable enemy, who was to be brought to terms; that is, who was to be brought to the pass of seeking pardon in his own blood for an unpardonable insult.

Tem-nur was deeply impressed with both the importance and the difficulty of his task, and it was with a sigh that he bade a prosperous journey to his master, the man of the inscrutable mind.





Chapter Sixteenth

DOING AND DARING

THREE days had passed. The imprisoned conductors of Aseneth were pining away with impatience and the dread of the ultimate decision of their fate by the powerful and uncompromising P'tehebra. Phares had communicated to his luckless associates what had that night transpired between himself and the governor. Hence they were not looking forward to a favorable issue of their cause with P'tehebra; Phares himself was entertaining serious misgivings. His dismissal from the nightly visit had been so curt and informal.

In the meantime some ill-advised guard informed them of the latest news that had reached Tem-nur's ears — that the slave whom Theman had carried through the gate was Joseph, the son of Israel. The convoy of a wagon train of provisions for the garrison had chatted about this choice bit of gossip at the camp-fire.

It set all their natural passionateness ablaze. They had seen the slave and had had an opportunity to examine him; had they used their wits, they should also have recognized him. Then they could have prevented his transportation into the interior. But no; they had been so preoccupied with their own interests that they had looked for nothing but his size: whether he

might be their little ward Aseneth. It was humiliating in the extreme! A scion of Abraham in the power of that contemptible tribe of Ismael! The blood of Jacob to be sold into bondage to the heathen!

They themselves were little better than the heathen, and were only Semites far remote from the noble line of the descendants of Heber; but they were insanely jealous even of that least distinction, of being tribesmen of the Hebrews with a hiatus of at least five mixed generations between Heber and themselves, and a leakage at the origin of the family of Abraham. Their jealousy was sufficient reason for them to rave and rage over the disgrace visited upon the son of Israel, their master by inheritance from Abraham.

At first they attacked Phares, who had caught the message, like wild beasts, throttled, cuffed, pummeled, and kicked him; not because he was more guilty than any other, but in order to wreak their ungovernable rage on an object patient enough not to oppose their lust of doing harm. But after they had realized the extent of their impotence, they sat down in a circle, turning their backs to one another, and set up their customary rout of howling and lamenting, and of cursing each other.

In the evening a troop of the guards, especially detailed to take care of them, opened the shed and set before them an abundant quantity of food and drink. Both anger and sorrow melted away before the temptation of the steaming pots and foaming jugs, and they fell to, doing justice to the occasion with a zest that was born of a healthy appetite and a disregard for ceremony at so important a function. Not even the wine bottles were viewed askance more than once — except by Rahuel, who shudderingly turned away from

Samma, the first one to plunge the neck of a bottle into his throat and smack and gurgle with the delight of a sucking shoat. Phares alone contented himself with a jug of cool beer from Kedi as the liquid adjustment of his repast.

But after they had taken a more than comfortable fill of the bounty of P'tehebra, they again allowed themselves to be rudely jolted out of their peace and contentment. The head of the hunters, whom Tem-nur had especially charged with the supervision of the prisoners, entered and announced to them that the governor would not return before another three or four days. "Have patience," he counseled them with dubious suavity; "it may all turn out in the end for your better luck." But they arose to a man, shouting and snapping at him, and menacingly shaking their fists in his face. Again Rahuel was the leader and the worst offender. The self-possessed huntsman, however, met their assault with a cynical, superior smile, sprang aside, and dashed out, slamming the door and adding a lock to the bolts. Also the guards were doubled. Now they were prisoners indeed, and not guests any longer. This change of the view of their position was made plain to them the next forenoon, when their bodily wants were attended to by armed waiters and their meal served to them from a grated slide in the wall. It consisted only of bread, melons, fruit, and water. Meat and wine were denied them. It was but natural that this retrenching of their allowance should goad them more to continued rebellion than their imprisonment.

At sight of the frugal fare Samma wept copious tears of regret, and Rahuel, stung to the quick by the speedy reprisals rather than by the scantiness of the food, was

overpowered by his indomitable fury. He went from one to the other, knocking the food out of their hands, applying also his foot at times, when one would stoop to catch the bread whirling across the floor, and sending the craven sliding headlong over the fugitive loaf.

"What have we done these cowherds," he roared in the midst of the confusion of spilled and scattered victuals, "that they should impound us like dogs? Have we not come down to them as honest men? Are we beggars or bandits? Are we men — or midgets? How far will you stretch your patience to endure such insult?" And Rahuel was shaking with rage.

"Go then," one replied scornfully, "and deliver us! Can you batter down these stone walls with your head?"

Both Rahuel and his opponent had spoken amid a tumult of protest from the others, so that their words were confused and could hardly be understood by them, not to think of the watchful guard outside. But now Rahuel hushed the noise with a violent waving of both his arms, and a hissing through his clinched teeth, and motioned to his comrades to follow him to the rear of the spacious stall, where their effects were piled up in bundles and packs on top of another pile of confiscated wares. They followed, Samma snatching up a loaf on the way, and a melon as big as his head, and concealing them in his coat.

"Do you notice," Rahuel whispered, pointing to the flat roof, "that there is a wide opening between the brim of the wall and the edge of the roof? You are cowards; you are badgers, patiently to leave your foot in the trap until the trapper come and despatch you with a cudgel! I will not remain here to let these insolent cattle kings flay me at leisure and make belts of my skin!"

"Such ranting is of no avail," Phares essayed for the sake of peace. "Even if it were possible for us to scale these walls, we should fall victims to the darts of the watchmen outside. Our misconduct has made them wary and watchful."

But Rahuel countered instantly. "The fox," he said intensely, "would rather bite off a foot than be caught in a trap; but we consent to be sitting here like washerwomen by the water, and bemoan our ill-luck. I swear to you: These walls shall not hold me back!"

"What would you do?" Phares asked, not a little afraid of the explosive violence of his impetuous and passionate tribesman.

"What would I do?" Rahuel bellowed, but again immediately lowered his voice and set himself to a careful unfolding of his scheme: "One more night, or two at most, I will resign myself to this outrage and insult. P'tehebra will not return before the end of the third day. If we are docile and meet our jailers civilly, they shall soon be deceived by our assumed meekness and tractableness; for these genial clodhoppers hate to bear a long strain of mistrust and suspicion as an Asiatic vice. On the third night we will form a ladder of our bodies, climb to the top of the wall on the side of the desert, above Rachor's grave — which circumstance presages a blessing — and spring down to the low outer wall, whence we can glide noiselessly into the waters and the mud of the canal. Thence we shall move through the reeds of the bank until we are beyond the reach of their arrows. Once that I am outside, it would require the astuteness of one more cunning than Tem-nur to bring me back. And P'tehebra is absent — a curse upon his whip!"

"But what would you do in the desert without camels

and without water?" Samma objected, seriously meditating upon his chances of suffering from thirst in the dusty sand waste. "I would rather continue here subsisting on scant fare than risk being the guest of gaunt hunger out there. Away with thee and thy empty delusions."

Rahuel passed the interruption over with silent contempt and proceeded: "I have given this venture much thought during the whole period of our detention. The guards habitually drive the camels out the gates every morning for watering, and then let them roam along the edge of the canal for grazing. This is done at so early an hour that none will think of us, especially if we shall give them no more cause for displeasure. The two or three guards who will go out with the beasts must be taken off carefully; their carcasses we shall hide in one of the marshy islets a little below the gate. We lure the best beasts down the bank, and under cover of the wilderness of reeds and grass we can gain headway enough to elude pursuit in any definite direction. And a handful of black hangsmen we can finish without much loss of time: Our direct goal should be the 'Arm of Mizraim'; thence we may hold down to the sea. What do you think of the plan?"

He searched their incredulous faces for a flicker of hope, at least, if not for a flash of enthusiasm; but his search was vain.

"You doubt," he continued, "because you are afraid of hunger and thirst. But even this specter can be banned. The next two days shall be fast days. Whatever we may save of our rations we will put aside, concealing it among the packs and boxes of this heap of merchandise. On the night of the second day we shall put everything over the wall. I regret, however, that

we shall be obliged to leave most of our baggage behind us. We may select a few stout bags and leather bottles and take our knives and short javelins — not a princely equipment, forsooth, but quite serviceable for our needs. Our plan then would be, not to return immediately into our own country, or again to stand as beggars at Hent-ha-nur's gate, but to visit either the tribes of the south of the peninsula of Sina, or the quarrymen of the mountains. There we may rest ourselves, and find opportunity to cross over by the sea, and revenge ourselves for all our suffering by raiding the lesser towns and hoarding their wealth in some secluded spot until we may be able to remove it safely either by sea or by land into our home country. What is your pleasure now? Can you not take heart to act like men? Do not stand here like kittens at the water! Rise up and be men and burst your prison!"

"But how can you get over the wall?" Samma asked, as phlegmatically as if Rahuel had spoken about the prospects of the weather. "If we make a ladder of our bodies, it will boot only one or two to reach the top by climbing over the rest; the others are not tall enough."

"Pish, brother," Rahuel responded pointedly. "We shall let you climb up first; then you may sit down and watch how the others will ascend, so that you may know."

Some laughed at the cynical retort, but others shook their heads in doubt.

"Why do you shake your ears as if a hornets' nest were here on a rampage?" he muttered threateningly. "Can you not understand that we can cut up these hides into thongs and make ropes of them strong enough to haul an ox to the top of a pyramid? I make no

apologies for your size and weight; the ensuing fast will help to reduce your fleshly preponderance to the normal measure of human impediment.

Once more Phares undertook to recall Rahuel from his desperate venture. "Rahuel," he pleaded, "listen and consider. The first stage of your scheme is not impossible of attainment. But every succeeding step after the first is doomed to failure. You will be obliged to commit murder ere you may leave your first hiding place. Murder will subject you to the bitter necessity of fleeing and of adding crime to crime before you will be recaptured; then there will be no thought of mercy for you at the hands of an outraged country. You will be made the common victims of all the grudges of which many pardoned malefactors have been the objects in the past, and your lot will not be worth the pity of a demon. I will remain and trust in the humanity of P'tehebra."

"P'tehebra is a hard man," Rahuel insisted. "I would not cast my lot with those whom he stoops to pity. We have forfeited his good pleasure, and as many of us as would remain after our last onslaught on his hunter would risk their heads. I shall abscond at the first opportunity."

Phares had greater confidence. "The prince does not understand our manner," he submitted patiently. "He is just, according to his faith and the laws of his king. It is no wonder that he was offended, first at our arrogance, and lastly at the sinful disregard we showed for the fate of Aseneth. His sense of duty as contrasted with ours in our brief dealings with him and his officials is as a rock-ribbed mountain compared to a cloud of flying dust. He will know our ways and judge them more kindly if we honestly display but a

little of the meekness and respect which you advise us to simulate, and he may be disposed to dismiss us in peace with a slight chastisement."

"I will take no chastisement from a heathen!" Rahuel hissed hotly. "I am a son of Moab, who has no need of obedience or chastisement. Our heritage is the round of the earth. I hope to live to see the day when the children of the East shall set their foot on the neck of Ham!" Such being the professed convictions and desires of Rahuel, Phares thought it useless to continue the discussion. He separated from his brethren and sat alone in silence and sorrow.

The two days following this discussion were spent in strict fasting, but a decided division took place among the band. On the second day Phares had only six adherents left, the rest of the troop having gone over to Rahuel. It was insinuated to Phares that he should betray the plotters and thus frustrate their design. But Phares had resolved to put nothing in the way of his rebellious countrymen, and was determined with equal firmness to remain in captivity, even though his last comrade should forsake him.

The conduct of the prisoners during this period was an exhibition of consummate hypocrisy. When the hour approached for the guards to appear in order to distribute the rations, they drew their faces into living masks of hunger and sorrow. They also unbound their scant attire to make it tangle loose and disordered about their bodies, so as to emphasize the impression of hunger and repentance. They discarded their head coverings, and tousled and mussed the hair of their heads and beards, and slabbered their beards and the bosom of their garments.

But on the second day this voluntarily imposed

penance became necessary and permanent. Rahuel had espied the head of a watchman peering down at them from the top of the wall, and had imparted his discovery to his partizans. Phares and his few faithful adherents were forced to act the same difficult and unpleasant comedy. It taxed the endurance of the most willing to the limit, and who knows but the wiser group would have yielded its standpoint had the test lasted several more days. But that night the feat was to be dared to escape from the midst of alert watchers and to depart on a journey of at least ten days in the country of the enemy.

Rahuel and — curiously enough — Samma had twisted two long ropes of leather thongs. They had worked in the dark, behind the heap of boxes and bags, from sheer necessity. The ropes might not be uniformly strong, but in the opinion of Samma, who delighted in doing such secret work, they were at any point strong enough to bear his weight. Water and other provisions were kept ready, their effects were packed and banded, and each was provided with a knife and a short javelin. Instructions also had been given in detail, and the hour of midnight was anxiously awaited. After midnight there would be no more inspection, and the outside guard would be withdrawn from the wall, and the large gates of the entrance would be closed.

There was no stir, no sign of life, about the prison. Rahuel had expected to be disturbed once more by the hunter, but the hunter had not put in an appearance at the shed for the last twenty-four hours. It seemed a little strange, but he might have set out to meet his master on the return from the southern Gate. At all events, the less seen of him the safer the exit. That

hunter was one of the same cold-blooded kind as his severe master.

At midnight, when the trumpet of the commander resounded over the courts, Rahuel raised himself from his straw simultaneously with his confederates. He turned up the loose sleeves of his coat and pulled the skirt of it from behind through his legs, gathering it in front at the same time, and tied it up with his belt about his waist. The others all did the same, as they were instructed to do. When all were ready, standing in line, the spare-bodied Nathan at the head, Rahuel cast the ropes over Nathan's shoulders and once more measured the height of the wall with his eyes.

"Thirty feet," he whispered; "the seventh man will touch the brim. Nathan, take the seventh place! Samma, first place, please! Spread your legs and press your outspread hands against the wall. Good! Just this position! Samma, you are as good and safe as a rock. Forward! Seppho — Omri — Omer!"

Rahuel tied together several lengths of the staves of carriers, of which a large supply was at hand, and placed the improvised pole against the wall for a support of the hands, and then Seppho climbed on Samma's shoulders, Omri on Seppho's, and each of the others on the shoulders of his predecessor. Nathan reached the wall at the height of his knees and sprang on the brim as lithely as a cat. He held his breath and listened. There was no stir. Not even the big watchdogs gave a sign of their presence. They could not have been silenced if they had been at home; the hunter has taken them with him on his trip. Auspicious beginning!

Nathan fastened the ropes on two rafters and was kept busy for some time hauling up the bags and bottles

of necessary provisions, which he carefully stacked on one side, where they could readily be thrown down to one standing in the reeds. After that, seven more climbed up and, immediately springing down outside, secured the precious provisions which they concealed in the grass and under the coping of the stone bank of the canal. It seemed almost ghastly that no one should watch and interfere with them. But there was no disturbing element about the place, except the bright, inquisitive moon, which seemed to take a particular pleasure in assisting them.

Now came Rahuel's turn to ascend. His proportions were a good deal above the average, and some members of the living step-ladder groaned under his weight; but he availed himself of the support of the ropes, which now hung empty, and was safely landed. Then the living step-ladder itself began to move and to be dismembered. The topmost member swung himself free upon the wall. The next was pulled up with little difficulty. But the remaining four had to be hauled up under full strain of the ropes, which soon began to look raveled and frazzled at the points where they were knotted together. Yet there was no mishap. If only Samma, the giant, were safely landed! But he grasped the ropes lazily and allowed the whole dead weight of his mastodon proportions to hang unassisted. No climbing with the feet, which would have eased the strain on the dangerously squeaking ropes, but an easy and comfortable hold and an implicit trust in the luck of fools — and the ropes snapped in twain and Samma fell back on the littered floor with a crash that made the attentive Phares shudder.

"Toss up the severed ends," Rahuel hissed at Phares, nothing troubled about Samma's misfortune. But

Phares now showed as little inclination to obey as Rahuel had shown during their altercations. He arose and deliberately advanced towards the injured man, who lay stock still.

"Let me have the rope ends!" groaned Rahuel, livid with rage. "I will mend the break and help him to be free!"

"Go your way, Rahuel," answered Phares in a low voice, "and take care of the life of your brethren. This one is injured so badly that he will not again think of climbing in a month."

Rahuel muttered a curse and cast down the other ends of the ropes at Phares' feet. A moment after, he disappeared, and a slight splash announced that he had slid into the canal outside. They were free, sixteen of them — at least for the present. It was a mystery to the more sober-minded Phares that the task should have been so smoothly accomplished. There was no arrow from some out-of-the-way lurking place, no bugle blast from the watchmen in the turrets, no challenge from the silent sentinels about the governor's mansion. It was uncanny, for the thing looked impossible.

But Phares had little leisure to pursue his thoughts of mistrust and apprehension to their logical conclusion, which could not be but that the fugitives were either shadowed by secret watchers or already doomed to meet with their just deserts at a time and place appointed by previous arrangement. Samma's condition thrust a new problem on Phares' hands. He was disabled in the act of flight, and it would be preposterous to endeavor to convince P'tehebra of aught else but that they all would have escaped had the ropes not broken. Phares dreaded the coming meeting with P'tehebra and the scene that would be enacted at the discovery of the

flight. Yet he did not waver in his resolution to show deference to the man who had tacitly taught him so plain a lesson of faithfulness to duty.

At present his main concern was about the bulky form of Samma, which lay before him outstretched and motionless. Samma's eyes were closed and his fists clenched about the pieces of the ropes which should have helped him to be delivered from captivity. "It may be better for him and for the fleeing band that he was forced by circumstances to remain here," said Phares to himself, disdaining to arouse his adherents, who had again rolled themselves up like hedgehogs, after the flight had begun, and had gone to sleep. They had not even taken sufficient interest in the proceedings to watch the absconding of their companions. They had cast their lot with Phares; now let Phares take charge of their destiny.

Phares knelt down at Samma's side and began to examine the fat giant. Feeling of the copious soft padding of Samma's body with a hearty clutch, he quickly dismissed his doubts as to the chances of serious injury to so softly cushioned a frame. "This must feel like falling into a tub of butter," he mused half-aloud, "or into a heap of grain." He stubbed his knuckles into Samma's sides and pinched his arms — and noticed that there was a slight twitch. He continued his manipulations, watching the face of his patient, and soon saw that his eyelids trembled and his nostrils were dilated and his lips quivered, all with the appearance of suppressed pleasure and mischief. He raised one of Samma's legs a few feet from the floor and let it drop full weight without warning; for he was angered at the shamming of the big fellow, who would not hesitate an instant to maintain, when threatened

with death, that he and the rest would have disappeared with the fugitives, but for the untoward accident.

But as the heel of his foot struck the floor, Samma cried out, opened his eyes, pulled up his legs, and made a quick effort to rise. The shout which was touched off by the striking of his foot was a mingling of painful protest with a little surprise and a good deal of pettishness. "Ouch," he cried; "my back is broken in two, brother!"

Phares knew his man. "Try to sit up," he said, with the kindliness one might employ, rod in hand, in putting a dog through his tricks. "It is not as easy as you think to break so large a mass of good flesh in two. I will fetch some ointment to rub into your bruises, and before morning you will be able again to stand on your soles."

About an hour after Phares had begun his strenuous treatment, to which Samma submitted with deep satisfaction, another attempt was made at raising the unshapely bulk. This time the patient sat up without difficulty. Phares assisted him again, and encouraged him with an energetic pull at his head to rise to his feet. A yell, a jump, and Samma stood firmly and solidly on his natural bases.

"Praise ye the kindness of the Lord with me," he whimpered, "that I am not broken like a reed!" And when Phares put a staff in his hands, he took a few steps, slowly, heavily, and cautiously, and added in the same silly tone: "And that I have not lost the power of my thighs!" His comrades had been awakened by his antics, and right heartily laughed him to scorn.



Chapter Seventeenth

SWIFT RETRIBUTION

RAHUEL had guided his confederates to a cove where shrubbery of papyrus and date palms and sycamores, overgrown with vines, afforded shelter and safety. Here the walling and coping of the canal was interrupted, and the water pushed its way aside from its course and eddied at ease in the shade of a grove which lay about it in the shape of a human ear, the opening of the shallow basin being much narrower than the bowl, and verdure and foliage following the contour of the brim. Here the baggage, such as it was, consisting principally of the plainest provisions, was noiselessly assorted and distributed in handy bundles, ready to be flung on the backs of the camels which were to be stolen.

A short while before sunrise the gates were flung open and the stamping of many heavy, but soft-soled feet announced the race of the hungry beasts for the pasture. Rahuel's face came as near to producing a smile of pleasure as his unfeeling breast could permit when he saw that the animals issuing out first were their own beasts. Merob was at the head of the file, and the cunning and experienced old pilgrim of the desert no sooner was clear of the gate than he attentively poised his funnel-shaped ears, then dipped them forward, bent his head to one side in an attitude of listening,

then raised his faithful, shrewd eyes without raising the head towards the distant hiding place, sucked in the air as if filtering and tasting it, and in a trice scampered off in the direction of the cove. Most of the beasts followed Merob, more from habit than from inclination, as ducklings follow the hen that hatched them: not much interested in the guidance, and a little doubtful, but yet obedient for want of a better developed instinct. The domestic beasts did not trouble about the guests and their peculiar ways, and scattered abroad the fat islets and patches of green as their fancy might lead. There were no watchers with the camels. Two or three men might be stationed at the gate, to judge from the occasional flip-flap of a dirty coat tail at that point from behind the door posts, and from the lazy wagging of the shafts of a few lances, which the bearers evidently were holding between their legs while gesticulating and telling stories.

Merob put his head deep in the bushes and nosed about among the leaves, browsing with undeniable distraction and drawing his body in, slowly, as if feeling his way. "Down on your knees!" whispered Rahuel, and laid his hand on Merob's wet nose. The beast knelt willingly and was loaded with Rahuel's scant earthly belongings. The other camels also forced their way into the thicket and were similarly captured and loaded. But there were more camels than riders. It was impossible to turn back the faithful beasts which could not be put to use, and it was difficult to decide in what way they could best be disposed of without attracting attention. None of the fugitives could take heart to kill anyone of their mute and affectionate traveling companions, which had acquired habits of friendships through sharing the hard lot of their riders

for so many weeks past. And it was hardly feasible to let them travel free and at their leisure; for camels take on at times an erratic mood worse than that of mules.

"Tie them up!" Rahuel gasped, relieved after a heat of hurried calculations, and immediately put his conclusions in effect. The poor animals plainly showed their disappointment by tugging impatiently at the short halters and turning their resentful looks upon their false friends. But there was no other way out of the difficulty at present. They had to bear the injury for the safety of the party rampant.

Then Rahuel gave the signal for departure. Each of the fugitives was leading his mount by the bridle, as mounting was out of the question so long as they were within sight of the watchmen. But moving down rapidly on the outer edge of the fringe of reeds, papyrus bushes, and bulrushes of the double height of a man, they soon disappeared in the thickets of thorns and wild figtrees which lined the shores of the salt marshes. These were strung together in a long line for the distance of a two hours' ride, following the course of the neglected canal, and, a seemly distance apart, extended into the desert. Here they boldly mounted and adjusted their luggage and their weapons.

"This feat was almost too easy to be real," Rahuel remarked to Omri. "I feel as in a dream; I am dazed from the success of the venture — or, perhaps, from the stress of excitement and fear over a threatening discovery and a most disadvantageous flight. If only — have you no suspicions, Omri?"

"Suspicions, did you say?" Omri replied drowsily, like one unwillingly roused from dreaming. "What do you want me to suspect? Here is the open desert

on the one hand and the poisonous marshes are on the other; an Egyptian will keep away as scrupulously from the hot sand as from the dirty water: then there is no more danger — hence no room for fear or suspicion.”

It was easy reasoning, but was following a false start. “I am afraid of an ambush, man,” Rahuel enlightened him gruffly. “Keep your eyes open, every man of you!” he cried, turning towards the variously disposed groups.

There was not much joy in evidence. Had there been difficulty, danger, and a death or two in the delivery, then there would have been also the satisfaction to know that a chapter of the story of their exit was already closed with honors. But now all their adventures were lying ahead. It was like leaving an intrenchment with the enemy anywhere and nowhere. It would have seemed safer to be giving the enemy a chase. All the subsequent desultory talking and guessing resulted in nothing but that it convinced some of impending dangers and confirmed others in their indifference to their future fate. But having Rahuel for their leader, a tinge of confidence was not lacking in their apprehensions.

Towards noon the heat became so oppressive that they decided to rest. They had reached a place which was comparatively cool for the grateful shade of a cluster of dwarfed palms, out of which purred a limpid stream of sweet water. The ground rose a little towards the east, the direction of the desert; was rocky, with a luxurious growth of thorns and thistles, and formed a large hump right at the edge of the sea of sand. Towards the west, in the direction of the marshes and the canal, the ground sloped rapidly, pushing a tongue of dry and hard land around the

edge of the last of the salty lakes. The vegetation was not luxurious, except at the lower edge of the lake, where a noisy little rill was carrying the water from the spring into the lake. There the vegetation was rich and magnificent, but narrowed into thick clusters, with two or three stately palms towering aloft in each cluster and the humbler products of the grateful soil crowding at their feet. But the several islands of vegetation were so grouped together that from the distance they appeared to be one uniform large patch of sprouting and blooming pleasure and joy in the wilderness. Several of these separate fertile spots were twined together, and the spaces between them were canopied with dense foliage.

Rahuel, in looking in the direction of the lake, after he had leaped from Merob's back, thought he had heard the snarl of a dog from out that island of green. But he was parched with thirst and more anxious to restore his vigor than to count the enemy. At all events, he could cope with no enemy of any sort in this condition of fatigue. He flung himself prone on the ground and drank long and copiously of the cool stream of the spring.

There was none in the party but stood as sorely in need of internal repair as the leader. The beasts also stationed themselves, a little below the men, at the rill. The water that escaped all those thirsty lips for a long pause was not enough to float a fig leaf. After the refreshing drink the beasts trotted off in search of food, and the men just turned over on their backs to rest, and to recall to themselves in detail the daring adventure, and to weigh the advantages to be gained by this flight, against the chances of winning the good pleasure of P'tehebra, had they remained.

There was little, if anything, to be gained. They were not sufficiently provided with the means necessary to journey safely through the narrow and hostile border of bog, marsh, and morass linked together in an interminable chain of obstacles and noisome nuisances along the boundary of the land of their desire. They would be obliged to sojourn for a time among the Midianites or the Arabs on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, although both these tribes were not on friendly terms with any of those who claimed kinship with Abraham, because they themselves claimed the exclusive distinction of being Abraham's heirs. Or they would tarry a while at the royal mines and quarries of Sina; but that possibility was fraught with unpleasantness: they would have to carry ore in the company of the royal slaves — an occupation surely not inviting to liberty-loving herdsmen whose backs had never bent so low even as to grind wheat at the primitive handmill. Yet, they could learn the language of the land, and observe the habits of the people, and watch for an opportunity to sail away to Memphis with a load of copper or *mafkat*.¹ Once inside the land they would hide and hold like rats, nevermore to be dislodged.

These thoughts were in the hearts of all and upon the tongues of all, but none dared to give them vent. They would have appeared more disagreeable from the evil countenances with which they would have been received. So each harbored and nursed a glimmering spark of dislike for all the rest, and held his counsel in the dark.

While engaged with such musings Rahuel was once more startled with the seeming delusion of hearing the

¹ Emerald and turquoise.

suppressed vicious snarl of a dog. He was undecided whether to arise, fearing that he might thus only feed the fire of an overheated imagination, or to keep still and listen — which would be bound to work towards the same effect. But Nathan, who was known to have as fine an ear as a hare, and who had lain at the side of Rahuel in a comfortable doze, also started, and raised himself to a sitting posture, tapping Rahuel on the chest with all the fingers of one hand. The other hand he laid hollow to his ear.

“Brother,” he said with his usual quaint meekness, but without the usual shade of deference, “brother, there is trouble in the wind. Have you heard them growl?”

“Heard what growl?” Rahuel feinted.

“There is one of them!” Nathan cried, sprang up, and climbed into the vines overhead which clambered between the trees.

The cry had scarcely left Nathan’s lips when four of the dreaded wolf hounds were upon them, red-mouthed, maddened with repressed desire, and panting with eagerness for the attack. Rahuel and all his companions had sprung to their feet, javelins poised and dirks loosened. The first of the dogs, a huge, ferocious beast, sprang at Rahuel with all fours, intent upon burying its savage teeth in his throat. But Rahuel never was so much himself as when danger was closest. He dropped his javelin and took one step aside at the instant that the brute leaped up, caught it by the throat with both hands, throttled and shook it until its tongue hung purple from the foaming jaws, and then gave its head a violent jerk, breaking its neck. When he threw the limp carcass on the ground and kicked it away, it was pitched at the feet

of a man approaching Rahuel. He looked up and stood face to face with P'tehebra.

"Your life for this misdeed!" P'tehebra shouted at him, and instantly clinched with him in a desperate struggle.

In the meantime the other fugitives had saved themselves from the attack of the dogs as best they could. Some had climbed into the trees after Nathan, with lacerated garments and limbs scratched unto bleeding, others had run away and had sought a hiding place in the crags and holes of the stony mound at their right, and two or three had been fortunate enough to reach their beasts and turn to flight. But P'tehebra's chief hunter, who had come up with the governor, whistled to the dogs and sent them after the fugitives. They were soon brought to bay and returned to the scene of the encounter with their frightened mounts.

Rahuel had literally to be torn from P'tehebra. The wrestlers were evenly matched and equally hot with rage and the desire of revenge. It took the combined strength and determination of half-a-dozen of P'tehebra's attendants to pull the infuriated Moabite away from him. Rahuel had locked his powerful arms about P'tehebra's neck, watching for an opportunity to treat him in the same manner as he had treated P'tehebra's dog. He had P'tehebra pinned to the ground so that his arms and legs were rendered useless. It was owing only to the presence of mind of the trained soldier, with which he discerned his adversary's object and, therefore, unremittingly directed every ounce of the power of his back and shoulders towards the neck, that he held out against the design of his brutal antagonist. But at last Rahuel's arms were pried open and P'tehebra

was freed, not much the worse for the rough handling, but in a towering rage.

Rahuel was lashed to a tree with his face turned towards the trunk. The torn and dirty rags which were left on his body after the encounter, as the remnants of his attire, were removed and his body was bared from the top of his head to his heels. All his confederates were likewise stripped and bound, but were stretched out prone in the grass, their hands and feet being tied to opposite stakes driven into the ground.

"Now give them the whip!" P'tehebra commanded, fuming with unquenched wrath, "and no halting unto the blood!"

The procedure that followed was inhuman. After it was finished and the delinquents were unbound, their mounts were gathered and leashed together, and P'tehebra returned to the cluster of islets from which he had broken in upon the unfortunate party of deserters.

The chastised Hebrews paid no attention to his departure. They lay motionless; no groan, no moan, no word escaped their compressed, purpled lips. They appeared like dead, but for the flickering fire of their staring eyes. But when they heard the boasting blast of a bugle sounding out from the retiring party of the governor, Rahuel painfully raised his head and looked after them. He espied with his bloodshot eyes a litter borne in the midst of the group, decorated with varicolored cloths and tinsel, and the small figure of a child seated under the canopy. "Aseneth," Rahuel murmured, "Aseneth, the cause of all our suffering — and of this —"

"Speak it out!" whined Nathan; "say it loud, my brother! Say it and choke not: 'and of this awful

castigation!" I have never seen, heard of, or experienced the like in my poor and humble life. O Rachor, O Phares! Would that I were asleep a hundred cubits beneath this accursed soil!"

"If there be power in a curse," Rahuel responded with a deep, quivering, rumbling voice, "and if there be consequence to an oath, hear me, Sons of Misery! If there be satiety in the drinking of blood—" he screeched and squealed like a cornered boar—"if there be a God aloft who hears the vows of men: Cursed be the land of Mizraim and the tribe of Cham! And may a just God give me breath and strength to be clothed with this curse as with a garb of fire to bear death and destruction abroad in the land of Mizraim and among the sons of Cham! Revenge or death!"

Then he directed his disheartened confederates to gather up all the blood with which the grass was stained, distributing among them small shreds of the remnant of his mantle, which he was tearing to pieces. "Soak them right red unto dripping," he complimented the more willing. Having collected all the pieces he squeezed the blood from them into the hollow of Nathan's hands, and dipping a finger into the dark purple mass, which was fast congealing, he marked first his own forehead and breast and then the forehead and breast of each of his followers with that common blood of theirs, in the shape of a decapitated cross and a serpent, saying as he touched each one: "*Rahu* be thy ensign and thy name; *Rahu* thy light and *Rahu* thy might!"¹ "Amen!" they replied, and, most heartily, Nathan.

¹ *Rahu* is a Babylonian word, meaning "Avenger," or "Evil One," and was designated by the picture or symbol of the serpent. The decapitated cross was the sign of immortality to be won through a Saviour.

After that mystic ceremony they collected what shreds were left of their habiliments and what morsels of their provisions, and slunk away. If P'tehebra could come to them dry-shod from the path leading through the arbors around the end of the lake, they too would profit by the disastrous visit of the governor, and, in consequence, held towards the inner side of the unsightly belt of Egypt; a band of men much mortified, but unreclaimed, plodding along afoot on paths that exacted not only the full courage, but also the full endurance of a well-equipped and well-mounted rider. "Revenge!" growled he from the depth of his breast, who had at their unimpressive exit from the lower gate groaned "Ruach Musri" with all the intensity of abomination of which outraged humanity is capable; and "Revenge!" echoed from the heart of everyone of the sorely misused rebels against the uncourtly style of Egyptian hospitality.





Chapter Eighteenth

TAMED JOYS

THE arrangements for trapping Rahuel and his band had been a simple matter. These unsophisticated Orientals were not the equals of the cultured Egyptians in shrewdness. Their plan had been betrayed by a thousand circumstances that had been especially designed to keep it in hiding. In particular the sudden change of their manners and moods, as indicated by their sheepish patience and their exhibition of abject humility, and their quiet and secret conferences could not but be noticed by the vigilant and observant inspectors of the Walls. After the discovery of the plot it was thought proper to put no obstacle in their way and to further their preparations without arousing their suspicion. True it is that the Egyptians also overshot the mark with their ostentatious forbearance, which amounted to little less than patent connivance. Had the prisoners not been so preoccupied with their scheme as to pay no attention to anything else, they should have suspected the trap when they could not help smelling the bait.

The keeper of the hounds had gone away to meet the governor on his return from the south and to inform him of the impending delivery of the prison. The fugitives could not but pass by the spot selected for the ambus-

cade unless they should foolishly take the route to the north, which led through the most unhealthy region of the land, through the fever marshes hanging in swarms, like murderous vermin, on the "Arms of the Nile." It was not at all likely that they were unacquainted with the conditions of travel in that direction, to which there was no termination except in the mud or in the sea.

As P'tehebra proceeded on his homeward journey, not a trace of his anger and excitement was left on his features. His score with Rahuel was settled, sealed, and buried in his bosom forever. He did not doubt for an instant that the uncouth Moabite would never again engage in an expedition that had Egypt for its objective point, if he survived the flogging or the subsequent hardships of his progress towards the southern country.

The chief huntsman, the keeper of the hounds, however, held a different view and was not slow in stating his own opinion in contradiction to that of his superior. He was on terms of intimacy with P'tehebra, being of the same stock and holding the office of scribe in the service of the pharaoh, which entitled him to a hearing all over the land. P'tehebra had remarked, casually, as he wished it to appear, that the luckless visitors under chastisement had counted every blow, "so silently and attentively did they take their punishment," he jested.

"They will return as surely as the sun in the morning," the keeper assured him earnestly.

"Let them come," rejoined P'tehebra coldly. "Their blood on our whips will be dry before they will be strong enough to hatch another scheme."

"They have hatched their scheme already, sir. I am sure that their flight was only the first step towards a

completely outlined course to be pursued. You may catch a fox, but you cannot catch the devil!"

"For the present they are cared for," P'tehebra observed curtly, like biting off the thread of the conversation; he wished not to be troubled with the thing any longer. Perhaps his conscience was not well at ease over the unnecessary severity of the chastisement due to his humiliating lack of self-restraint.

Long before dark they entered their own gates. The attendants were permitted to retire to their quarters and a small patrol of the guards took charge of the animals which had been recaptured, and stabled them with the other beasts which had been rescued at the cove. Merob, however, was not to be separated from the dromedary which was bearing his little friend Aseneth. Only when the girl was taken down from the canopied seat, and was ushered into the large council chamber of the governor, did the faithful old drudge consent to the separation.

After the governor had partaken of a generous repast, at which Aseneth had the honor of being the chief guest, the remaining prisoners were summoned into his presence. He was again seated in his chair of state. Aseneth occupied a gaily decorated seat at his left, as lofty as that of the stern governor. He was rather disquieted, but the girl was full of joyful expectation. She was richly attired with the garments of Hent-ha-nur's daughter, and wore on her head a golden circlet with which Hent-ha-nur had decorated her; "in recognition of her princely estate," he had explained. The impressions of hunger and hardship had worn off from her appearance and she was again herself, a picture of radiant innocence and innate refinement.

At the appearance of Phares and his frightened

followers, P'tehebra fell to questioning them without offering or acknowledging a salute. An Egyptian of the old stock was so much a superior being that he could disdain the compliments of intercourse with such lowly offshoots of humanity as — forsooth! — were these Hebrews.

“Such then,” he began, “is your mode of requiting my indulgence! What is it that has prevented you from following your foolish brethren? Speak, fox! The sound of your voice may reveal to me the treason which you harbor in your breast and which your tongue would refuse to confess. You are false — as false as the illusion ¹ of the desert!”

The smile of a joyful welcome vanished from Ase-neth's lips. The little girl looked up at the governor's darkly shaded eyes and imploringly raised her clasped hands towards him; but the mysterious man never responded to her gentle gesture of petition. Phares was not much frightened, being resigned to his fate, but he was at a loss what to offer for an excuse, or for clearing up the situation. Of course he was ignorant of what had happened to the foolhardy band of deserters. Yet he gathered from the address of the governor that the flight, together with some of its features, had been betrayed. The knots by which the ropes had been fastened to the rafters of their pen had been inspected by the overseers that morning, and although P'tehebra had not had a conference with Tem-nur, yet he had arrived home with a full knowledge of the disastrous fact, which he could have gained only from one who had observed the preparations. Or — Phares gasped at the dreadful conjecture — had P'tehebra met the absconders!

¹ *Fata Morgana.*

Phares' eyes apprehensively wandered from P'tehebra's face all over P'tehebra's garments searching for traces of blood, and then along the wall where P'tehebra's swords and dirks were displayed, clean and sheathed. Now he remembered that he had noticed several leather whips, black and hard with dried blood, which had been cast aside by the attendants in the courtyard at their arrival. "Beaten to death!" he sighed audibly, but did not essay to proceed.

Samma, who was standing behind Phares and who towered above the whole group from the height of his chest, was making grimaces at Aseneth. He grinned at her, showing all his teeth, which protruded from his shaggy and coarse mustache and beard as he opened his mouth, and his lips retreated with his effort at being friendly. P'tehebra took no notice of him. After a little while Samma raised his arms, stretching them out towards the girl, and working his fingers in an effort to lure her to himself. Still P'tehebra paid no attention to the clown. His eyes were fixed on Phares. He noted the shadows that flitted across that uneasy countenance and that wrought confusion in those darkening features.

Phares remained silent. But Samma was so intent upon establishing communications with Aseneth that he forgot the circumstances of his presence, pushed Phares aside, stepped out from the group, and placed himself at the side of the child, fondling her hands and stroking her cheeks. It was not long before he patted her shoulders, and he seemed much inclined to bestow the same favors on P'tehebra. At least he ogled the severe man suspiciously and winked at him during his silent exhibition of fondness for Aseneth. At last he grasped the girl carefully but firmly under the arms

and lifted her from the seat, gathering her into his huge arms and hugging her tightly to his breast.

"Now, my good man," he addressed P'tehebra, who had watched his doings at last with a good deal of not unkindly interest, "you may have me whipped, or stabbed, or throttled, or hanged, or quartered; but you shall do none of these evil things to me unless you do it also to my little mouse here. I should like to meet the man who can wrest her from me."

This was said with a large measure of good-natured defiance perfectly in harmony with his uncouth and determined appearance, softened only by the tenderness of his affection. A change was creeping over the face of the governor. His contracted eyebrows relaxed and were raised, and his glowering forehead was clearing and brightening.

"Why do you not speak?" he said, scowling at Phares. "Have you no excuse to offer, no defense to make? Were you implicated in the plot? I have had little interest in detaining you except that I desired to bring back to you this child — which is a treasure from the hands of God — and to send you ahead on your mission. Rahuel was punished for his arrogance; and his companions, because they had not shame enough to flee his company and scout his evil counsel."

Now Phares replied: "I warned them and admonished them to put their trust in your kindness and justice. We have made mistakes that deserve no pardon, but we are strangers in this land and to its people. We have sinned through ignorance. Are my brethren dead?"

"I think not," P'tehebra answered, a little flustered at the start which Aseneth gave at that unexpected question. "I think not," he repeated a little more

decidedly. "But if Rahuel had not been flogged into helplessness, he would not have rested until he had taken my life. He is a powerful wrestler! Are there any among your brethren here who had also planned to escape and who were prevented?"

"Why does he want to know this?" Phares wondered within himself. Verily this man was as deep a riddle as the colossal silent monuments staring at the visitor from all sides in this mysterious country. First he holds out a hand to receive an excuse, and then he reaches out after the scourge. But Samma relieved his anxious leader of the necessity of betraying him — for the subterfuge of lying would no longer avail. Who knows but P'tehebra knew every detail of the wretched scheme!

"Only one more of us was on the side of Rahuel," Samma volunteered, "and that one is I! But I was growing stiff in the limbs and lazy and dull from want of exercise in the open. So I offered to go along, just in order to limber up and to rid myself of my superfluous weight. Your servants almost stuffed us with good things, like birds stuffing the food into the hungry maws of their young. I am willing to stay with you, sir, if you promise me not to use the whip on me; for I am tender, sir, very tender, and most intensely sensitive to the rod. It is a failing which I contracted in boyhood."

"What, then, prevented you from escaping with the others?" P'tehebra inquired lightly, ignoring the rest of the gush of Samma.

"The rope broke, sir," Samma said impressively, "and I fell backwards, almost breaking my backbone in every link. They offered to retie the rope and take me out, but I would rather have Phares anoint my

bruises and rub the wrinkles out of my skin than risk another climbing and such a flogging as was sure to come upon the deserters."

"How did you know that they would be intercepted?" P'tehebra asked interestedly.

"How did I know, sir? I dreamt the night before the delivery that I saw fifteen camels growing wings like birds and flying aloft to perch on a large palm tree. I shouted at them: 'This is no place for such twisted quadrupeds as you; come down to earth, where you belong!' And Nathan, one of our escaped brethren, stubbed his thumb in my side and awakened me and said: 'Peace, Samma,' said he; 'there is one of our watchmen on the wall!' 'No,' said I; 'it is one of the camels in the palm.' Then he laughed at me and said that I was a 'camel in the pound.' But when I was fully awake I said to myself: 'Samma,' said I to myself, 'the palm tree is no perch for a camel, and the top of the wall is no place for you; keep on level ground.' But yet I allowed Rahuel to persuade me to join him, and that was foolish. And whenever I acted foolishly as a boy I got the rod to kiss — so there; the flogging was due for our folly!"

"It is a wonder you are still alive," commented P'tehebra, now all serene and smiling. "Let me imprint a kiss on the brow of your precious ward and you shall be dismissed in peace."

He arose in his seat. But before he could step down, the giant had taken a step forward and was holding up Aseneth in his hands to the height of P'tehebra's lips. A kiss, an embrace, as cordial as it was regretful on both sides, and the audience was ended. "Go to the gate to have your papers signed," he directed Phares, and motioned to his adjutant, the keeper of the hounds,

who had been a wondering witness of the whole strange spectacle, to follow them and to assist them with the preparations for their departure.

Probably never before had a happier band of visitors left the station than this of the conductors of Aseneth. There was rejoicing and blowing of ram's horns, tempered only by a lurking insecurity due to a doubt whether all this joy were true or only a mockery of their fancy — or of the cunning of this deep, strange man, on whose nod had but this instant hung their earthly fate.

"Half beasts, half men!" the self-conscious keeper of the hounds observed to P'tehebra, as the liberated troop filed along the road inland. And a roar as of a hundred victorious lions resounded like an echo to the unkind compliment from the receding travelers when they saw that the inner gates were at last peacefully closed in their rear.

"But in them is the making of a sturdy race," P'tehebra commented thoughtfully and testily, as if the words had left a bitter taste in his mouth.





Chapter Nineteenth

IN THE MINES OF SINA

RAHUEL arrived at the mines of Sina only after another month's labors and adventures. Three of his adherents succumbed on the road to the inhuman hardships of the journey, and the rest were so sore and sick at their arrival that they were immediately put away in the colony of the invalids by the overseer of the mines. Even Rahuel was temporarily unfit for work. His dogged determination to save his life for revenge against the wrongs inflicted on him by P'tehebra had sustained the fast failing residue of his vitality until he reached this station of rest; but here he broke down in a heap. The ardent and untamed desire of doing a wrong to P'tehebra, a thousand times greater than the wrong he himself had suffered, ate away at his vitals like a consuming fire.

Yet despite his exhaustion he applied for employment. The superintendent looked him over in surprise, but said nothing, and put him to work in a shed where the ore was broken up for the smelters. The workmen all over the place were either slaves or convicts, but, for the most part, at present orderly and quiet men. Most of the drudges had been convicted and sentenced for no greater crime than indolence and shiftlessness — which was considered as detest-

able as murder in that busy and orderly land of the Nile.

Within a few days Rahuel inquired what compensation he might expect for his labor. "A pot of flesh meat, a jug of water, and an apron," Peremptah, one of his fellow-workmen, enlightened him. "But I am not a convict, a victim of the blood-ban," he returned angrily. "I should receive a just wage."

"The whip, perhaps," the other said convincingly, and pointed to the purplish welts across Rahuel's shoulders. "Friend, you are fallen among wolves. Take the advice of an experienced man and make no demands on the master of the mines. He is a king in this part of the earth and the right hand of the pharaoh. Had I known what the 'Mines' meant for a poor, foolish old goat like myself, I should rather have unhooked every joint of my body turning the waterwheel than risked living by the bounty of the king."

"Why do you not break out, kill the keepers, and strike out for liberty?" Rahuel suggested, with the horror of his own breaking-out creeping up and down his spine.

"It would be treason, friend; treason." No Egyptian was ever guilty of treason; loyalty was born into them, and then bred and fostered until it became as natural for them to be loyal as to feel warm.

"Bosh, treason!" sneered Rahuel. "Every man is lord and master of himself, if only he has the courage to assert himself."

"Well," replied the phlegmatic native, "if once you taste the whip of Sina, you will change your mind on many things; as I, for example, now take a different view of the independence of a lazy drone. I used to think that it was nobody's business whether I labored

and ate, or labored not and ate, so long as I could find someone to feed me. But the king made it his business to round up all the 'driftwood' and put it to use for the good of the community. 'Indolence breedeth murder and maketh thieves,' the preamble to his decree reads. I did not trouble about the law and kept on sunning myself by day and foraging by night; but the law troubled about me until it had me landed at this place of torture. But I am not a worse man for being a victim of the law."

"Law?" Rahuel stammered. "Law? Who is this Law that he can make a slave of a free man? There is no such thing as Law tolerated in the land of my home!"

"I could see that as soon as you came in upon us," jested the native miner. "But, pray, do not mistake my speech. 'Law' is the will of the king which rules the nation."

"Have you no will of your own down here?"

"O cats and crocodiles!" cried the Egyptian; "a will? Ay, my innocent friend! Too much will and too many wills! And this is why the king puts his will over us as one would put a hat over a bird's nest to take up the whole brood at once. A will of our own! Pshaw! Had I not had a will to live a life of ease at the expense of my fellowmen? Has the soldier not a will to lord it over the husbandman and the craftsman and the merchant? And has the taxgatherer not a will to gather a little also for himself when he gathers the measures for the 'High House?' And has the wine dealer not a will to take the cow and the calf together for a cask of wine when he has bargained for the cow alone? And has the tavernkeeper not a will to grab the breech clouts also when he takes the coat for a

weekly reckoning? A will! Ay, too much will! Were it not for the supreme will of the pharaoh, we could not grow big enough to have a will at all. We would be made slaves in the cradle. No, my friend of the strong will, bow down and live, or raise yourself in the face of the king and die like a scorpion by the sting of your own tail of pride."

"Plain talk!" muttered Rahuel; "but I will not consent to work for your king for nothing. If he is wealthy he can afford to give me my pay, and if he is poor he has no right to have anybody work for him —"

"Wrong, man; wrong again!" corrected the talkative "pensioner" of the king; "an idea of the East! If he is wealthy he can make anybody work for him, and must have people to work for him in order to draw off the surplus of his wealth in a profitable manner; that is, so as to lead it where it is needed, among the busy and shrewd, who turn it into wealth for themselves: just as we tap the Great River to irrigate the farthest fields with its saving abundance. Had we no river, no field could be made to sprout. If we were constrained to water the far fields from our kitchen cisterns and carry away water in the hollow of our hands, thistles would soon overrun the laughing fields of grain. No, Rah — ; what is your name? Rah — Rack — ?"

"Never mind my name," Rahuel answered peevishly; the Egyptian annoyed him with his rushing flow of enthusiasm. "What do you think of a *poor* man employing others without hire?"

"Such a *poor* man would have to be a king," Perem-ptah answered cheerfully — and Rahuel began to suspect him of rallying. One could never know when these swarthy buffoons were in earnest, so happy they appeared and so quickly they returned to an even

mood when at any time moved by a sudden touch of passion.

"How now?" Rahuel persisted. "What about a king in the person of a poor man? Are you at the end of your wit? It is cheap enough to be so short and dry. Out with your wisdom!"

Peremptah had stuffed a handful of slivers of the dried root of the lotus into his mouth and was busy adjusting and moistening his quid, and was in no hurry about this pleasant occupation. It required a little time and attention to make the load sit comfortably and advantageously. Rahuel was watching the barbarous exhibition with disgust, but was determined not to lose sight of his part of the argument, especially as he suspected his opponent of a desire to quit with the honors of the contest in the balance.

But the man of the beastly habit of chewing grass by the root, like a mole — so it appealed to the more fastidious Chanaanite — after a little pause hemmed a few times with utmost, innermost, and intense satisfaction, and then proceeded calmly:

"'Short and dry wits' need refreshing once in a while — you understand? But as to your query, a poor man who can employ men without hire must be a king. First, because a king employs men to work for the state, which is the nation, and the nation consists of the laborers of the king, together with all the other good people of the land; hence the laborer of the king works for himself. Why, now, should the king pay him? Second, because the laborers of the king owe a debt to justice, they being either disturbers of the peace, thus retarding progress and the march of public prosperity, or being lazy drones — as I have been — they clog the movement of public activity, feeding on

the sweat and blood of their fellow-countrymen. By their labor they pay their debt to justice — why should they expect other reward?"

"But I am a stranger, and I have offered my services of my own free will, and not because your *Law* compelled me," protested Rahuel.

"If you offered your services gratuitously, why would you expect to be paid for them?"

"Hear, now, old pachyderm," Rahuel exploded; "is this condition prevalent throughout the land?"

"Ay, as prevalent as the vanity of woman."

Rahuel at first gasped at the ingenuous comparison and was prepared to voice his ideas of Egyptian statesmanship in his customary fashion. But after second thought he closed his mouth, laid a hand over it, and cast a longing look at the locked and barred gates in the wall. "I will work for my brethren," he said after a considerable pause. "But not longer than they shall need your help," Peremptah supplemented the resolution of his untractable partner in the ore pit. Rahuel did not think it worth while to gainsay the prophecy, because it was really the complement of his own idea, and again set to work swinging the sledge hammer on the refractory lumps in the shallow bed and thinking of P'tehebra, and a king who could make his will the rule of conduct in the whole land of Mizraim. In particular his fancies grew most vivid when his sledge descended on a hard, glassy lump, the breaking up of which required greater and repeated efforts; but despite his energy he could not make blood spurt from the brittle mass!

Rahuel toiled on seemingly as contentedly as his partner, the dusky philosopher who had condescended to initiate him into Egyptian jurisprudence. His

brethren were again on their feet and laboring for the pharaoh, after they had spent nearly two weeks in the shed reserved for sick or dying slaves. The occasions on which they could communicate with their leader were very few and so disposed that they could establish an exchange of thoughts only by signs. The occupations at the mines were varied, and the field was so large that many groups might be working within those silent walls and on the sides of these mountains of dead rock for several weeks without knowing of the presence of others.

After a few weeks Rahuel was sent down into the earth. The cavern at which he entered opened into a mountain, first descending rapidly to a considerable depth, and then ascending gradually above the level of the surface outside. The novice had learned this on the first day by counting his steps in going down, and then, in climbing up on the other side, making a generous allowance for the slower grade on the ascent. Having established this important fact, he studied the site of the mountain in relation to the wall which ran into and stopped at the western slope, because the slope ended in a sheer wall of rock about twenty feet above the top of the wall. A few lounging and loafing guards were stationed at that point; but as far as Rahuel's plans were concerned, an army might have been encamped within the enclosure, so long as the other side was clear.

Rahuel was fast again waxing sleek and strong. The work under ground was subject only to desultory supervision, the food supplied by the "law-making" pharaoh was good and plentiful. Only the water was an abomination—and Rahuel soon acquired the "bestly habit of also chewing grass by the root,"

because it afforded a relief from the parching thirst. What most preoccupied his mind was the question how to make the general overseer send also his confederates into the ground. It was his plan to have them work with him on the same vein, which extended through the mountain in a northerly direction; just the direction of liberty. He could dig out so large a quantity of ore that nobody would suspect him of squandering the pharaoh's time, and at the same time he would be digging his way to light and liberty. But as he would not flee and leave his brethren behind, he had to consent to practise patience, the virtue which he hated best of all virtues.

After two more long weeks of speculating and scheming without effect, Rahuel in the night placed his turban on a picket outside the pen in which he and his fellow-laborers were confined. His tribesmen had to pass that shed in the early morning and would take due notice of Rahuel's headgear. The next night he placed it on a picket of the fence within which the donkeys were enclosed, and which was opposite his own place of confinement. Again his brethren took note of the signal. The third night it was dipped in honey and placed on the top of a weather-vane, at the request of Rahuel, by one of the condescending heads of divisions. "He should like to trap a few bees," he had explained to his unsophisticated superior, "to relieve him by their stings of a rheum in the eyes contracted from the dampness of the mine." This sounded like lunacy in the ears of the honest Egyptian, but his petitioner was a foreigner, and foreigners do entertain such notions and superstitions.

The Hebrews saw the signal: the wind was blowing from the north. Hence, first: the turban outside the

pen — that means, I will be free; second, the turban on the fence of the donkey stall — that means, I will be free with the assistance of a donkey; third, the turban above the hand of the vane pointing north — that means, I have discovered an avenue of escape in that direction. They were anxiously waiting for the signal enlightening them as to the initial step to be taken.

But on the fourth day the turban was not in sight. Rahuel was in the infirmary. He had rubbed so much garlic into his eyes that they were watering like balsam shrubs, although not with the same fragrant liquid. "He could not distinguish his feet from his hands," he had complained in his own grim manner, "unless he would bite them." He was shown a little consideration and was left to himself to complete his scheming.

In the evening of that day his own brethren were, under guard, conducted into the shed to receive instructions from him. His tier had yielded such rich ore, and in such large quantities, that the Egyptians would not let it rest for more than the one day which Rahuel had lost in nursing his "rheum." He directed the men extensively, pointing out that they should follow the vein straight ahead without declining right or left. And at the end of his elaborate explanation he added: "Take my turban down with you. It bears a charm with which you will conjure the sprites of the caves, and the Mistress¹ of the *Mafkat*, so that they will readily yield their richest treasures." The guard in their rear drew up his nose with a scornful smile, but made no objection when they took Rahuel's turban from the bench of the infirmary. It was the superstition of foolish Asiatics; why should he object?

¹ The goddess Hathor.

The infirmary was not guarded. But all the miners were locked up at night. How could Rahuel deliver his confederates from the pen? A week passed without bringing relief for Rahuel's malignant "rheum." By this time the tier should have been pushed to the very shell of the mountain. His brethren did not report to him — had they fled? But after another day the wily Nathan was sent to Rahuel to obtain information about the removal of a large heap of stone and dirt which had fallen down during the night right ahead of the tier.

"You fool," Rahuel complimented him. "That is the coat of the mountain side; two or three feet more of digging and you will have the light of day peeping in on your slow feet." Then he counseled him to demand a team of a dozen mules and a dozen sledges, to take out the dirt. "And tomorrow night you offer to work all night in order to clear the way," he said, "and ask for me to be present as the director of the work. I will be ready to do anything for the pharaoh despite my affliction" — with a wink; "but see to it that you will obtain double rations. Tomorrow night we shall be free!"

And the next night the cheap slaves of the pharaoh had escaped and had borrowed the pharaoh's donkeys for an accommodation on their journey northward to the extreme point of Sina on the eastern gulf. Their flight was not noticed until the evening of the next day, owing to the prudent provisions that had been made to explain their possible delay with the work of clearing the most productive of the mines of the pharaoh.



Chapter Twentieth

LUCK AND LABOR

LONG before Rahuel had effected his escape from his voluntary bondage, Phares had arrived at the temple of On and had delivered his charge into the hands of P'hotepra, the chief priest of that imposing sanctuary of Ra. Having acquitted himself of his task, he sought to obtain a grant of land for himself and his associates. But all his efforts in that direction failing, he accepted an offer from the foster-father of Aseneth of joining the servants of the temple. In this position, which was both honorable and lucrative, he could not only observe the advance of Aseneth in years and her development both in mind and in body, but also had many opportunities of proving his own real worth, of gathering valuable information, and of polishing his own manners, and thus pushing his way forward and upward by degrees, until finally he should be admitted into the ranks of the priests, who formed a caste¹ by themselves, inferior in nothing, so far as prestige and estate were considered, to the castes of the scribes and the military men. Once that Egypt had granted hospitality to a stranger, it generously denied him nothing that could make its favor agreeable and profitable.

¹ The different social classes were not *castes* in the Hindu sense.

The tribesmen of Phares had gradually drifted away from the confines of the large territory of rich fields, orchards, and vineyards that formed the landed holdings of the temple. Laboring for "the king's hire" was as little to their taste as it was to Rahuel's. Hence being too rude and uncultured to fit into the smooth mechanism of the temple service, they had been set to work in various places as menials, with no promise of reward other than that of their keep and with the option either of returning to their homes or of seeking for themselves more suitable and lucrative employment. This privilege was a generous concession, enabling each, as it did, to make the most of his personal abilities and to advance himself in the social scale in proportion to his individual skill and ambition.

Samma was the last to leave, although he was the first to be expected and desired to withdraw from the clean and quiet region of the "City of the Father of the gods." He most assiduously cultivated the love of the wine cup, and, what with his uncouth capers and antics, when intoxicated, made himself a perpetual nuisance both to the servitors and to the priests. At last a strict supervision of his potations was enjoined, and when thus his well of pleasure ran dry, he secured for himself a set of fine garments from Phares, which were the cast-off robes of one of the priests of larger than the mean proportions of the natives, garbed himself, and with becoming dignity issued forth from the sacred precincts, a man of the consequence and the imposing presence of a favorite at Court. He had learned to speak the language of the country with some ease and elegance, the whole trend of his body and soul bearing towards the single civic virtue of peacefulness, because it could be practised without stress and strain-

ing. Before he had left he had confided his intentions to Phares, having hinted to him that he much admired the life of the students at the royal temple schools. "But inasmuch as I cannot decipher these queer characters of their writing," he had said, "I shall devote myself to promoting good fellowship among these favored wards of the king and to setting them an example of a good life, upright, and free from the cruel cares of strife and ambition." And Phares had blest him for his noble aspirations.

Samma had the wonderful gift of absolute self-trust without the slightest suspicion as to its perennial and abundant source in his good-nature. His sunny disposition, his childlike ignorance or unconcern for the views of others, which could not but jump with his own conception of the purpose and value of sociable living, and his irrepressible craving for happiness untarnished and unalloyed, conspired to produce a personality which none might love, but which everyone was loath to injure. Moreover, Samma did not lack the courage of his convictions. Everywhere he preserved his outward dignity, claimed the privileges of the favored, mixed with the best, and disdained the society of the lowly. On the boat which carried him to Memphis he sat with the wealthy merchants, invented stories for their entertainment, and put so much sand in their eyes concerning his importance as a special commissioner of the pharaoh, deputed to inspect the schools of the kingdom, that they fell over one another in their eagerness to secure him as their companion at meat and wine.

Samma's fancy was an inexhaustible source of entertaining incidents which he had observed "in the land of Chanaan on the occasion of his visit in that country

as the envoy of the pharaoh on an errand of securing a shipload of ointments and frankincense from the opulent Hittites." He was safe in straining his bow to breaking when talking about the land of Hal; for anything was believed as not only possible, but as sure and true, that was told of the mystic land of the Great Sea.¹ "He had seen such abundant yields of the grapevine on the Hevite hills that the wine was cooked and steamed until it could be cut like bread, and could be stored away in chunks piled up to the roofs of the barns, because, of course, there were not goats enough to furnish skins for bottles. He had seen loaves of cheese so large that it required the united efforts of four men to carry any single one of them, for the purpose of stacking them in the temporary cellars dug especially for their maturing in storage. Figs as large as his head" — which was not small — "and dates as long and fat as his foot" — of generous size — "were growing about the tents of Israel."

When he mentioned the name of Israel he was plied with many questions about the life-story of the venerable patriarch of Beth-el and Hebron, of which so many entertaining versions had been carried abroad by both the friends and the foes of the strange tribe of Abraham sojourning among the ancient inhabitants of Chanaan. But Samma was ever equal to the occasion, and began telling them such a story of myth and truth commingled that their ears tingled and their breasts heaved with admiration of this accomplished and dutiful envoy of the pharaoh. But Samma had the good sense of telling his tale most disinterestedly — and by this stroke of genius saved himself from being discovered as an "envoy" of Israel in disguise and as a

¹ The Mediterranean.

plain liar in truth. These his traveling companions, upon arriving at Memphis, did themselves the honor of conducting Samma to the gate of the royal palace, and left him only after he had graciously and grandly assured them that he would recommend them, individually and by name, to the favor of his supra-mundane lord.

But inside the majestic courts of the palace Samma was lost. He did not tarry long among the busy servants of the king, who paid no attention to him, but hied himself to a tavern in the vicinity of the temple school, where he soon fell in with the jolly youths who were experts in the art of diversifying their amusements between lessons, and whom he had expressly descended to teach some new tricks at the game of the bumpers.

The other members of Phares' band had distributed themselves partly among the vine growers and partly among the artisans of the city, the majority of whom were immigrants like themselves. They were content to learn a trade and to earn an honest living, until they should be able to send home for their wives or betrothed — provided they found nothing suitable of that sort in their immediate surroundings. None seriously thought of returning to Chanaan. The lures of wealth and position easily within reach of an energetic hand were too strong not to dazzle the envious eyes of Semites who would gather the whole world into their lap to gloat over its glitter and to possess, hold, and rule it, and dispose of it as the lords of the earth and the masters of its peoples. It did not require a long experience of the facility with which a wise and active man could forge ahead of the easy-going native population to make them realize that the hardships and mishaps

borne for the sake of their mission had been a providential preparation, and many a one now thought of Aseneth with a grateful and reverent heart, as of an Angel of the Most High, a messenger of peace and happiness.





Chapter Twenty-first

UNWONTED DANGERS

THE northeastern coast of the Red Sea is formed by a range of rugged and rough mountains. The surrounding country, especially on the eastern slope of the range, was densely populated with a hardy tribe who called themselves the children of Abraham and his second wife, Ketura. They were undoubtedly of Semitic origin, even if their claim to so distinguished an ancestry should have been wholly inspired by vanity. The inhabitants of Southern Araby were considered to be a branch of their tribe, although it is more probable that the rather fertile and salubrious highland of the south was in truth the cradle of both branches of the family.

But all these people, whether mountaineers and goatherds, or dwellers of the smiling plains and tillers of the soil, were distinguished from their neighbors across the sea as well as from those across the desert by a ruggedness and symmetry of build and an acumen of intellect that made them the masters of their land without dispute. Ever ready for war, and not averse to doing a little marauding on their own account, they held their neighbors at bay and promptly checked every attempt at a hostile incursion into their domain. Their success and security had made them a proud and

hard people. There was no seafaring expedition bound for the mines from Egypt but was in danger of being headed off and picked up by their bold sailors, who often turned pirates just for the joy of showing their contempt for their wealthy and effeminate neighbors of the valley of the Nile.

Among these people Rahuel had planned to pitch his tent for a while. Their dispositions and habits, known the world over, were fully in harmony with his own; for the natural disposition for violence, and the acquired habit of it, are twin-sisters, either born of or fostered by pride. He was eager also to learn an art new to him, the expert in handicraft; namely, the art of building and sailing a vessel. Ever since his eyes had lighted on the large, free, heaven-roofed expanse of the wide sea, he had conceived a craving for the unencumbered liberty of the water like a fish cast ashore, and had resolved to stake his life against the opportunity of learning the trade of the sailors and of stealing a boat, if he could not build one, and sailing away with it into the luring, mystic distance that lay so placid and peaceful and tempting before his raptured gaze.

Immediately upon his arrival from the head of the gulf of Aila,¹ at the first station on the northern slope he insisted on being presented to the chief of the community. He had espied several barks rocking invitingly in a narrow bay, and the fever of his desire gained a hold upon him as strong as that of a bodily disease. Eophres, the chief of that outpost of the tribe, received the eager pilgrim with no little curiosity.

"What would a son of Moab from the sons of Abram?" he questioned curtly. And Rahuel, at the head of the sturdy band that had followed him through the trials

¹ The Elanitic gulf.

of his escape, answered courageously, but not less cunningly: "This son of Moab [striking his chest] would of this son of Abram [pointing at the sheik] that this son of Abram make this son of Moab his brother."

Now it was not permissible for a sheik to deny the request of brotherhood; the traditions of the tribe forbade it, and the rejected applicant could declare the blood-ban against the tribe. These Arabs themselves had obtained their wives by raids upon other Semitic tribes of the eastern boundary of the desert, among whom were found both Moabites and Amorrhites, and hence, although theirs was Semitic blood, yet it was not all directly of the blood of the grand old patriarch. Besides this foreign strain in their blood, another circumstance served to soften their feelings towards petitioners for affiliation from other Semitic tribes not Israelitic: the narrow passes between the uttermost spurs of the mountains encompassing the territory of the mines were inhabited by an offshoot of the Midianites, a kindred branch of the family of Abraham; Midian, or Madian, their progenitor, having been a son of Lot.

But these slight divergencies in the line of their descent would not have affected the racial pride of the Arabs and their position towards the other Hebraic tribes, had it not been that the direct descendants of Heber and of Abraham through Isaak and Jacob claimed the privilege of being the sole and exclusive heirs of the splendid promises of wealth and power and princely rank made to Abraham by the God of the Fathers of old. They would not tolerate the thought that they should be excluded from the blessing which was to come to them, and through them to the whole world, by the channel of Abraham's blood.

It was, therefore, the part of shrewdness for Rahuel

not to gainsay the intentional insult of the haughty sheik and to overlook the slap intended for the face of putative Israelites. It smarted, indeed; for everything unpleasant, even if by mistake directed at Rahuel, made his blood boil and his hair creep with resentment and anger. But now he had an object in view which obscured from sight all personal injury. He saw the need of making this spot his last and lasting stop before he would be prepared to pass over into Egypt for inaugurating his scheme of revenge. And he was nearly mad with the desire of sailing out on the water, that region of blissful freedom, for which he had craved all the days of his life. Ay, he must gain the friendship of Eophres or slay the whole tribe!

The delineation of the sentiment of murder was not to be mistaken in his face when he asked the Arab chieftain for the favor of brotherhood. Eophres noticed it and approved it.

"Are you then a son of Moab in truth?" he hastened to reply. "I surely thought that you and your followers are sons of Jacob?"

"Why then did you not address us as Israelites?" Rahuel countered stoutly. "We might have been proud enough to accept the compliment."

"But you would have been made sorry for the honor. Are you Moabites?"

"I am a son of Moab by my mother," Rahuel continued. "These my brethren are the sons of Chaldean herdsmen who came down to Chanaan from Ur with Abraham, or after him. We are not of the sons of Isaak or of Jacob."

"And what would you of us?"

"Live with you, labor with you, eat and drink with you, and fight with you!"

"Have you wives?"

"No, sheik. *Their* wives" — waving a hand at his followers — "were left at home, and I would not have a wife."

"Who is guarding your tents in your absence?"

This was a dangerous question to answer. Rahuel could not dare to say that their families were under the protection of Jacob. It would have been owning too close a proximity to the patriarch; nor could he dare to maintain that their tents were guarded by their tribesmen, because it was universally known that the whole family of Jacob was at times hard pressed by the natives of the land, and that there was no other tribe of Chaldean origin to assist them in their struggle against the impudence and intolerance of their hostile neighbors. Hence Rahuel was forced to relate the story of their mission and the events that brought them down to the foreign boundaries.

After a circumstantial recital, which had not passed without revealing in vivid flashes the passionate and barbaric nature of the narrator, the sheik offered Rahuel the hand of brotherhood and invited the whole party to partake with him of the "meat of brotherhood." The quaint ceremony was performed in this manner. The sheik first sat down on his heels on a mat spread out in the middle of the tent, and with both hands motioned to each in succession to sit down on the mat with him so that they would form a circle beginning at his left hand and ending at his right. Rahuel was the last to be bidden to sit down, and thus came to be placed at the right of the host. Then the sheik vigorously clapped his hands three times. That signal brought from one of the many smaller tents, which surrounded that of the sheik, a bevy of young

girls, who entered and stood awaiting the pleasure of their master. But he simply directed them with a nod of the head at his distinguishedly shabby company. The girls understood without explanation what was required and withdrew with a profound bow, executed by them simultaneously, evenly, smoothly, and gracefully. Silence prevailed in the tent until the girls returned, which was not before a considerable time had elapsed. But when they did return they presented a spectacle worth admiring. At their first appearance they had been only partly clad, their loose gowns flowing down across the breast from over the left shoulder to the waist, where they were gathered in, and one half of them wound about the trim and supple figures after the fashion of a sash, the other half enveloping the body to a depth well below the knees. Their luxuriant hair had been twisted and rolled into an unsightly, practical knot at the back of the head, and was drawn in and back over the top of the head and over the ears. This arrangement had made them look quite silly and stupid, like rabbits on a cold day eating the ice from frozen cabbages.

But now they presented a most pleasing picture. They were covered from head to foot — out of deference to the modesty of the guests — wearing headcloths of linen with colored borders of two and three stripes, and neatly arranged gowns of the same material and similarly bordered. The dress was plain, but tastefully worn. Their hair was loosened and tumbled and rolled down the back in heavy abundance, reaching far below the lengths of the veil, and streaming out also on both sides of the throat and over the breast. If there was one feature above the rest of their store of comeliness of which these simple maids were proud, it was surely

the natural adornment of their well-shapen heads. They had completely discarded the appearance of rabbits eating ice and were not far from resembling the ivory statuettes of Ashtoreth which were dangling from their necks on beaded chains.


Nathan, who was seated opposite the sheik across the mat, was overcome with admiration and forgot the amenities of Arabic hospitality. He looked up at the girls, while his companions kept their eyes immovably fixed on the host. Had the rigid ritual permitted an interruption of any kind, he should certainly have been rebuked; but that could be deferred until later. The sheik frowned: a plain disapprobation of Nathan's misconduct.

The girls were five in number, of graded sizes, the tallest being a maid of probably sixteen years, the smallest of about twelve, and the other three of any age between these limits. The first was about five feet in height, perfectly formed, of light complexion, rosy-cheeked and blue-eyed, and evidently of a cheerful disposition, if bright and twinkling eyes and a mischievous little mouth with upturned corners are an evidence of cheerfulness. The next in height and age might have been half a head shorter, showed a tinge of bronze in her complexion, which shaded and set in strong relief the marked lineaments of her face, and softened and finished the perfect oval of her head to such a degree that her face seemed to be made of velvet, and neither to begin nor to end anywhere in particular, but to be set in between her tresses and above the smooth throat just to form a background to the sparkling black eyes, the small, chiseled nose, and the tender mouth. She was undoubtedly a passionate, deep, and sweet bit of humanity, a miniature woman and a

budding mother, marked with all the contrasts, contradictions, and opposites of character, which in steel would spell resistance and resiliency, and in woman spell endurance and dauntlessness.

The remaining three were pretty maids, quite too young and frisky to allow their minds sufficient time for writing their tenor on their fair young faces. Their paradise as yet was all contained within their light hearts, and neither ray nor breath of it was allowed to escape into the unreal world; but neither was the unreal and hard world allowed to peep and to nose around in those hearts brimful of the delight and happiness of childhood.

The girls bore a large bowl on their hands in common in such a manner that each had a hand placed at the bottom of the bowl. At their entry they slowly and respectfully moved towards the sheik, and stooping set the vessel before him. Then rising and standing quietly behind him in a semicircle, with downcast eyes, they joined hands, and held them over his head.

The visitors stared at the strange ceremony. Slowly the hands of the very decorous and demure maidens descended and rested for an instant on the sheik's turbaned head. Then he in turn arose solemnly, lifting up the bowl with both hands, and presenting it to the first tall and fair beauty. She bent her face over it, catching up her veil and tresses, and three times blew her breath over its contents, forming invisible lines: the first, straight forward, the next, across the bowl, intersecting the first in the middle, and the third, in the form of a spiral representing a serpent, up the length of the first line, in this manner:  "The Strength of my father!" she breathed, almost inaudibly, and retired to the rear of the little group of her sisters.

Then the second bowed and blew over the bowl, allowing her longer hair and ampler veil to fall down on both sides of the vessel and to cover and conceal her face. "The Modesty of my mother!" she distinctly spoke her charm. "Zoroith, my darling!" her father breathed to her.

The third in line, a delicate little damsel, so fair-faced and fair-haired that she was hardly distinguishable from her light garb, bowed and blew quickly, her deep-blue eyes sparkling with pleasure, and recited: "The Sweetness of my sister!" bowing with exquisite grace to the tallest of the group, whereby she roguishly turned her back upon the bowl, the sheik, and the guests.

The fourth was a very bunch of happiness. She grasped the brim of the bowl, dipping her thumbs into the liquid contents, first turned up her laughing and dancing brown eyes to the sheik, then stooped so low that her nose was dipped in the shimmering mass and afterwards came out tipped with a spot of orange color, and whispered intently: "All the Happiness of myself!" She retreated, spoiling the gravity of the youthful countenances by the appearance of the mark of punished inquisitiveness on her nose, and forthwith grasped her elder sister about the waist.

But the ceremony was not yet completed. The youngest one raised herself on tiptoe, the sheik through distraction over the animation of the last charmer forgetting to lower the bowl. Before she had bent her face over the bowl she had dipped and submerged in the mass the ivory goddess which was suspended from her neck. She was a little frightened at the mishap, and again inquiringly looked up at the imperturbable face of the sheik. But he nodded encouragingly, and she proceeded to blow her mystic sign over the bowl.

"The Fruitfulness of Ashtoreth," she drawled dubiously, and added, pointing an apologetic finger at the guests: "But it is for their wives and daughters."

"Not for them all," the sheik whispered threateningly, bending down over the bowl so as to catch his daughter's hearing.

Rahuel and his brethren had been so attentive that not a detail of the ceremony escaped their notice. They had seen the ivory image of the goddess of Babel and Assur descend into the bowl, and had then and there resolved not to touch the heathen mess. "What would they ask of us? To practise idolatry?" This question was expressed on every face.

At length the sheik turned towards his guests and with solemn words bade them rise. Then he presented the bowl to Rahuel's lips. But Rahuel withdrew. Eophres never said a word and never changed a line of his features. He went on to the next — another refusal and another, down to Nathan. Coming to Nathan, the sheik turned around and solemnly strode up to the other end of the circle, offering the bowl to Omri, the opposite of Rahuel. But here he again met with a refusal. And the next refused to accept it, and the next, down again to Nathan who, however, reached after the bowl before it was offered to him. But Eophres stood still before him and said to him with the cold and hard accents of scorn and deep contempt: "No; not for you!" and bore the bowl back to the girls.

"Your blessings, your charms, your incantations are spurned, my daughters," he growled ominously. "Take it out and bury it under the tent-post of the chief of my warriors."¹

¹ The sheik was not always also the leader in war; just as is the custom of the Beduins today.

The girls received the bowl in silence, but with palpable disappointment and grief, and retired in the order and manner in which they had entered. After them stamped their aggrieved father, and the men from Chanaan were left alone in utter bewilderment.

"Dangerous ground, here," ejaculated Rahuel. "We must move on. Come, we will not stay here and wait like oxen for the slaughterer!" And he was already at the opening, with his dismayed brethren at his heels. Had the sheik only intimated what he had in store for them!

One searching look up and down the narrow alley between the double line of tents which was headed by the sheik's, and they hurried away, each in a different direction. Nobody was about the way to stop them. It looked suspicious. They cast about anxiously now and again as they raced down the fast descent, turning handsprings over boulders of rock and large moldering tree trunks, and skipping along like weasels with an anxious eye on the lookout for the hounds.

The sheik, together with his five wizard daughters, had vanished, and the whole post was as dead and still as a burial ground. Yet there were the goats perched on the cliffs and ledges, looking curiously after them, their busy mouths chewing fast and their beards pointing inquisitively in their direction; that is, in every direction, as they were flying down the mountain like the many streamlets of a suddenly bursting spring at the top. Yet there were the droves of donkeys in the gulches, small groups of cows in the narrow valleys, without herdsmen in visible presence, and withal a noisy flock of hawks overhead in the air, crying and piping and fretting, and circling ahead with the fugitives towards the bay, where three barges were

lying on the beach, half on the sand and half in the water.

Rahuel held directly towards the bay. But when he arrived, panting and overheated, he found Nathan already snuggled under the bench in the peak of the largest of the boats, wrapped in a sheet that might have been used as a sail. Nothing but his nose was visible. Rahuel kicked the bundle, and it began to wriggle and whine. "Come out," he commanded, "and help me to launch this boat!" Nathan most alertly undid his casing, sprang out, and pushed at the peak of the boat with all his might, while Rahuel, who had waded into the water up to his waist, was tugging at the stern.

Still no sign of pursuit. Were they to be so lucky as to escape unmolested by just that route which they had ever had in mind? It was incredible. But even when the boat lurched forward with a splurge and pirouetted, and Nathan climbed in over the high stern and laid hold of the ropes dangling from a frail yard-arm, not knowing what to do with them, and Rahuel sprang aboard, almost upsetting the shell, and disentangled the ropes and fastened them by the pegs in the sides of the boat, and tied the sheet and spread it against them, instantly catching the breeze and moving out into the deep, and when three more of his followers came hurtling down the beach and tumbling and leaping like frogs into the water and after them, and climbed aboard fore and aft, there was no sign of a hostile move on the shore. Rahuel was watching the two boats left behind. But they continued rocking idly in the sandy bed, as if things were bound by fate to happen as they were then happening.

Yea — were not the remaining seven even now manning those idle boats, and vigorously pushing with

the oars, and deftly spreading the canvas? They break away from the beach — they are under the wind — they are sailing swiftly out over the quiet water — this treacherous foe of the inexperienced sailor. And yet no raving sheik, no nymph-enchanted, no angry warriors. Was it true that they were bound for Egypt, by boat, with the consent of the Arabs? "Then the Arabs are fools!" Rahuel shouted triumphantly, as he manipulated the ropes that held his single sheet captive, in order to steer clear of a rocky tongue that the mountain stuck out into the sea a little below the bay.

Rahuel rounded the obstruction and cleared his throat for another trumpet blast of triumph and added scorn — but the shout was stifled in the issue and was repressed and flared out in several inarticulate sounds of dismay and rage and stiff-necked defiance. The galley of the sheik with everyone on board who was interested in the flight of the ungrateful pilgrims — namely, the sheik in the first place, then his five daughters, and also the archers of the camp — shot out from behind the bar and forthwith took up the pursuit as a matter of jest, or sport, or of a race for life or death. The Arabs did not even deign to look at the twain boats in the rear; they would surely founder and spill on one of the many bars and banks of this most treacherous of the seas. It was Rahuel's boat and, surely, more properly, Rahuel's person and the little imp in his company who were thought worthy of being assigned the rôle of the fox in this interesting chase.

No time was lost by either party in exchanging compliments. Rahuel headed immediately for the deep. It was a blessing for him that he was unacquainted with the character of the body of water which he was so bravely sailing. It would have been the height of folly

for any fisherman or pearl fisher of the Red Sea to swing a boat to its full capacity of speed on such an uncertain course. These waters were literally strewn with reefs, sandbanks, and jagged rockbars, and among them tugged and tossed two opposing currents enviously lurking to grasp their prey and to cast it upon the barely submerged rocks, and again to snatch it away and hide the wreckage from view in their submarine passageways and cavernous storehouses.

But Rahuel was ignorant of the death that breathed power into his sheet unto perdition. He firmly tied the ends of one common rope to both the lower ends of his single sail, and now pulled in at one side and then at the other, gloating with boyish pride over the straining and bellying of the canvas, at every new tug of which the light vessel moved right or left in obedience to his will as readily as a camel, but with quicker impulse and in livelier mood. He was delighted beyond expression. If the Arabs were eager for a race, they were not more eager than he. He had never sailed a boat before; but he had never desired anything so ardently in his life — barring his revenge on P'tehebra — as to be able to fly before the wind with the liberty and the swiftness of the birds of the air. And the novelty and delight of this experience blindfolded him to dangers and spurred him on to maneuvers and ventures which a sensible seafaring man would have pronounced the caprices of a madman.

The sheik's boat was a much larger and much more able-bodied vessel. It did, indeed, not carry enough canvas to offset the handicap of its bulk and weight. But when the track was getting hot, the archers laid aside their bows and quivers and took up the oars, plying them with a will, timing their stroke to the

measure of a weird melody that rose and fell as monotonously as the heaving of the sea. Under this new impulse the vessel leaped forward like a hound. But they had set their quarry a bad example. Rahuel had not known the use of the oar, except as in the hands of a single rower. He fastened his steering rope, sat down, and hurriedly instructed his companions, pointing back at the pursuers for an illustration of his lesson. Probably the fast diminishing distance between the two boats did more for the awakening of their attention than Rahuel's zeal and energy. They fell upon the oars with all their rugged strength, and although at first they splashed the whole bottom full of water and lurched heavily, many times catching a crab, still after several anxious looks backwards, they paid close attention to their task and, in a short while, in time enough to escape the hook savagely reaching after their craft, they plied those strange tools so dexterously that now they steadily drew away from the sheik.

Rahuel was again posted at the steering rope, standing up full height, nearly as tall as his mast. Now he let one side of his sail fly out at the full length of the rope, drawing the other in close to the mast, just for an experiment; for he had long felt a persistent tugging at his left arm — and lo! he had found the secret of the art: play out to the sail all the rope that can be safely let over the oar-trim, and watch the top. The light bark nearly leaped out of the water, straight ahead like an arrow, then ducked for a new leap, foamed, rocked, and cantered like a living being, like the pride of the warrior, the charging steed. Now Rahuel was safe — Oh, for the security of ignorance!

He had not yet had time to observe the conditions of his course. Once or twice he had thought he had

noticed on the right or the left of the boat, so near as to scrape against the keel, a large rounded rock like the back of a petrified giant crouched beneath the surface. He had likewise thought he had felt the grating of the boat gliding over well-packed sand, and had then observed that the vessel put up its nose and dragged its body heavily for an instant—where it would have been held fast but for its speed and lightness. So far they had not yet received a scratch or a jolt, or even a righteous dipping. But now he espied dead ahead a bleak white reef, quite long, stretched across his course. It had first seemed to be a line of traveling foam, such as might be produced by any aquatic animal moving along at the surface of the water. But it was stationary, although so low that only the keen eye of a man bred to the habit of close observation and quick perception could recognize its nature at a respectable distance.

One more glance along the rigid chain, a glance searching for an opening, for a break in the impertinent obstruction, through which one might try to shoot so narrow a keel; but there was no break in the serried file of the white teeth of the monster. Turn about, then! And the sail flapped over with a swish, as if in surprise at the breakneck turn, and settled down again to stanch straining and bellying.

The sheik could not but wonder at the deftness and precision with which the movement was executed. But he knew that at the outer end of that reef the current was so strong and swift that it would inevitably ravish the bold recruit from his course and dash him and his craft and his companions to pieces on the projecting pinnacles of one of the many submerged citadels of the deep. Then his task was done and he could

turn about for home out of these waters, where the dangers were multiplying with the rapidity of their gait. One could no more count the number of his fingers three times before the crash must come.

The sheik commanded his oarsmen to stop, and himself reefed the sail, leaving his bark to drift ahead with the swiftly dying force acquired by its speed. "See how death is luring —" he cried to his companions, but did not finish; his own boat had been caught unprepared by the insidious current which crept about at will among the reefs and shifted its course neither at the command of Eophres, the honorable sheik of the northern post, nor at the instance of the in-sweeping flood of the gulf, but rather at the instigation of the wind, or the cold waters of the abysmal bottom which rose at incalculable intervals to disturb and trouble the placid mood of the warm surface water.

The sheik's cumbersome craft was whirled about and hurtled over banks and bars until it was upset, dismantled, broken, and rent, spar and spill, and lay quivering in a heap of wreckage, like a crushed king-crab, on a sandbar. The occupants themselves were lost, scattered, and crushed, and the rags that were palpitating in the breeze, sighing and whistling about the wreck, were stained with their blood. The garments of the sheik's daughters hung in fluttering shreds about the splintered planks, reaching out as with imploring hands after the wind and the sunlight with the mimicry of the eloquent grief of the dumb. The bodies were already drawn down into the dark and dismal regions of the treacherous demons of the deep.

Before he took the desperate leap into the raging swirl which he had discovered ahead, Rahuel once more

turned his drawn and set countenance back upon his relentless pursuers, intending to measure the narrow margin of a chance of escape with a disabled bark, should the seething, racing torrent of whirlpools seize him too tightly to leave him an only opportunity of foiling its clutch, by turning abruptly into its course and permitting himself to be carried along on its spitting and hissing edge. "Take in the blades!" he had cried with a voice forced out of its natural pitch by the excitement of the approaching battle with an untried foe, when he tottered and reeled, but with a supreme effort steadied himself, tore down the tackling of the sheet, so that the sail collapsed and flew out like a banner over the brim of his craft, fluttering and flapping helplessly in the wind. His speed instantly was cut off, the boat reared and heeled, and already danced in the eddy of the fatal current.

At that moment Rahuel had discovered the vacancy on his trail, which struck terror into his breast like the looming of a specter, and appeared far more real and impressive than the actual pursuit had seemed. He also descried the curiously restless and palpitating heap of wreckage in their rear. It was a blow so unexpectedly dealt that its force was aggravated unto crushing by its unwonted terror. Had not they, too, passed over that trap of death only a minute before, and were they not now again face to face with another of these elusive and murderous phantoms? Yet they were helpless. If the vessel drifted two feet farther into the race, it was lost, as that was lost which lay there on the last thread of their course, not yet quieted from the shock of the deathly encounter.

Rahuel's companions realized the danger of the situation as keenly as himself, and instinctively shrank

from contact with the raving and roving opponent with whom none could close and wrestle on even terms. "Aseneth!" one groaned, folding his hands in prayer. Aseneth was for him the nearest approach of the supernatural and divine that he knew. But Rahuel, upon hearing the name which was the signature of all they had borne and suffered, sprang to his feet, shaking off his momentary stupor, and noticing that they were being held against a rock not more than a foot beneath the surface, leaped out and, with both hands clutched to the peak of the boat, pulled it back a safe distance from the whirlpool, feeling his way along the slippery footing, until he lost ground and sank under. But he reappeared in an instant, swung himself into the boat, and with the help of an oar pushed and guided it through the opening where he had missed his step, into more quiet waters.

Now sailing was neither so great a pleasure nor so easy a task for him as before he had experienced its dangers. He again manned the oars and bent his course backwards, cautiously threading his way towards the ill-starred bark of the sheik. He held outlook after his brethren in the other two boats, but could find no sign or trace of them. "They are doomed," he muttered gravely; "that path of death is not to be crossed by the unskilled recruits of the seafaring trade." He shuddered with the horror of his own escape.

The bark in turning back described a wide and carefully scrutinized semicircle over the course just passed. Rahuel approached the wreck from the south, passing it first at a distance of at least sixty feet. There was no swell and not a bubble to be seen around the bank on which the stranded vessel had been swept. The current that had wrought this ruin must have veered

from its path and may have rejoined the main current farther out. Rahuel examined the water around the bank, feeling about with an oar, and the approach proving to be a sandy slope on all sides, he drove the craft vigorously on the sand and beached it after all on board had disembarked.

While he was busying himself with a careful and complete inspection of the stanch little craft, his companions had fallen upon the wreck like a flight of vultures. After tearing away the confused masses of canvas, splinters, and shreds of garments, they simultaneously uttered a cry and recoiled from the skeleton. There was life in the ribs of the boat; at least in a heap of them that was gathered forward where the remnants of the prow were buried like a cradle in the sand and covered over with splintered bars and stanchions. They were moving faintly and interruptedly, but there was no doubt that they were moving.

Rahuel was attracted by the cry of his crew and their subsequent gibbering and chattering, and as none was courageous enough to take hold and remove the rubbish from the frame of the bow, he put a hand to the task himself, grabbing up two handfuls of splinters and briskly raising them so as to throw them aside. But with the splinters was caught a long piece of linen, at which he pulled and tugged until he heard a sigh from under the heap. "It is one of the sheik's daughters!" he gasped. At that every man set himself to digging and clearing away the rubbish. In a trice they had uncovered the bruised form of a girl, in whom they recognized the second of the sheik's daughters, the one of the peculiarly shaded tone of complexion, Zoroith.

Nathan was beside himself with joy. He knelt

down at her side, felt of her forehead, and pressed his ear on her breast. "The breath of life is still in her nostrils," he exclaimed, springing into the air and clapping his hands. But Rahuel was of a more practical turn of mind. "The girls have wished us well," he remarked. "We owe each of them a large meed of thanks. If we can save this one — Ah, she is recovering!" he broke forth, as the maid opened her eyes and stared at him. Then he lifted her up, and holding her gently in his arms, directed that the boat be made ready. "Push off!" he commanded. "I will wade out with my burden after you when you have sufficient water under the keel." His men obeyed, despite their curiosity and sympathy, wondering at the lack of sentiment and softness in Rahuel's breast which, in their opinion and according to their sentiment, should have overflowed with gushing fondness for their precious find.

The boat was rocking free of the bottom in a few minutes, and Rahuel waded out and deposited the unconscious girl in the stern, on an improvised couch made of a skimpy bench and more than half of Nathan's willingly shed habiliments. Then they sailed away, much more assured than before of Heaven's kindly providence over them for their deed of charity. But it seemed that their charity was enhanced a good deal by the circumstance that it was bestowed upon so enticing an object.





Chapter Twenty-second

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

THE conformation of the entire shore line of the Red Sea bears the characteristics of a cataclysmal cave-in. The comparatively narrow border of sandy beach is superseded by chains of hills and mountains of considerable height, which both on the Arabian and on the Egyptian side are cut and broken through with fertile little valleys, of old the humble homes of small communities of a thrifty and contented people.

Seventeen hours after the only surviving daughter of sheik Eophres had been found and rescued, the party of Rahuel, consisting altogether now of five men and the girl, safely put in on the Egyptian coast. It was growing dark, the shipwrecked maid was faint and sick, and her rescuers, one and all, were scarcely capable of moving a limb from over-exertion and a long-continued strain of apprehension and vigilance; for after the escape from the peril of shipwreck, their progress had been slow on account of the better realization and the fear of its difficulties.

They had not a morsel of food left. Thirst also was torturing them. All in all they were inclined to wish that they had rather perished than that they should have been cast ashore in so sorry a plight, without any prospect of relief. But as there was no sense in trying

to still the craving for food and drink by pitying themselves, they dragged the vessel on the beach and built a tent over it for the shelter of their unfortunate ward. Then Rahuel appointed Omri and Nathan as a watch at the tent, and with his two other companions went inland towards the hills to look for water and provisions. They agreed, before setting out, that each should go searching in a different direction and that the first to find what was needed was to return directly to the improvised camp.

After an absence of two hours Rahuel returned, accompanied by an old man and a youth, who were bearing between them a hamper packed with bread and meat, the young man carrying an extra burden in the form of a large jug of fresh water. Omri was not slow in assisting himself to a substantial repast. But Nathan snatched away the jug and stole in under the cover of the tent. Here he parted the tent cloth above the girl's head so as to let in the light of the moon. Zoroith was awake and greeted him with a languid smile. "Drink, my dear one," Nathan lisped ecstatically, and putting his hand under her shoulders, raised her up and presented the unwieldy crock. Zoroith drank slowly, but avidly, pausing several times between draughts, and expressing her gratitude at every pause with a glance at her benefactor and a faint smile. Then she again reclined her head on the rags arranged under her for a couch and pillow.

"A little food for my little one?" Nathan next suggested pressingly. She nodded satisfaction, and he slipped out with the jug, returning in a minute with a loaf of white bread, as large as a child's head, in one hand, and with a piece of roastmeat, weighing at least between four and five pounds, in the other. Zoroith

looked at him in surprise. But he broke the bread in small pieces, and also cut the meat in slices, and spread the good things before her on his lap on which he had set up a table by laying the seat of a bench across his knees.

Zoroith did partake of the food with increasing relish, and with her appetite her joy of living returned. Her features became more firm and settled, the fire was rekindled in her roguish eyes, and she soon began to pat the sores and bruises, with which her body was covered, with mock sympathy for herself. Nathan was all solicitude and attention. But after a little while the girl was overpowered by sleep and fell back on the cot, beckoning to Nathan to go out. The willowy little man did not at first like to take the hint; but it was repeated with a plain wave of the hand, and he had to abide by the orders of the self-willed girl.

In the morning, when everyone of the refugees was fully restored to a normal condition, Rahuel made preparations for his advance into the country of his desire. He sold the boat to the old man, who had remained with them during the night, and ordered his sadly simple dress, considering in his heart what a difference it makes in a man whether he be shabbily clothed or garbed in distinguished robes. That sheik across the sea and his archers and the five daughters of the sheik — mortals all, like himself, but — what an air of dignity had surrounded them, emanating mainly from the cleanliness, propriety, and distinctiveness of their raiment. Well, with the bright silver disks and rings jingling in his sash — the price of the boat — he could procure proper raiment both for himself and for his brethren — and also for Zoroith? For her ward-

robe needed replenishing as much as theirs. He must see the girl!

Zoroith sat in the warm sand, back of the boat. "What shall we do with you, my maid?" he accosted her, with an air of unnatural indifference. "Are my father and my sisters safe?" she crossed his query.

Rahuel felt a twitch at the heart. Pity had never been domesticated in his breast. He was a little confused at the experience. And he found it much harder than he had anticipated, to inform her of the full extent of her misfortune. The girl was too helpless, too meek, to accept a cold statement of the cruel facts without suffering from the blow. Rahuel would not injure the innocent and gentle. It was a gain for him even to realize that he was human.

"Your father," he said, and faltered, "your father was lost, I think — nay, I know — in the wild race at the reef." Zoroith bowed her head and was convulsed with an effort of stifling her sobs. But after a little while she looked up at him, anxiously. He had more to tell; why did he not proceed?

But Rahuel volunteered no more information. Zoroith arose, and laying both her hands joined on Rahuel's breast, asked pleadingly: "And my sisters?" Rahuel only nodded his head in continuation of his first answer.

"Then I will not return to my country and my people," the girl said in a voice trembling with emotion, and withdrew her hands. Rahuel went away to rejoin his brethren, but she remained fixed to the spot, her hands pressed over her heart and her eyes staring at the murderous waters that had devoured her loved ones. In this position she remained until all arrangements for their departure were completed.

Rahuel had, as a last thought, divided the price of the boat, giving each of his companions an equal share of six, he retaining one share for himself and setting aside another for the girl. This last share was to be given to him who would offer to take the girl with him on his journey. Everyone but Rahuel, and especially Nathan, was anxious to have Zoroith for a traveling companion. Her personal charm and the sweetness of her ways had turned their heads. She could only be a burden to anyone of them in their present condition; yet everyone was willing to load himself with so comfortable a burden.

"You cannot travel together in a troop," Rahuel explained in an endeavor to set their heads aright; "hence she cannot become the companion of you all at once. It would arouse suspicion, and suspicion in the mighty is the next of kin to violence. Let us cast lots."

"Nay, brother Rahuel," Nathan protested; "she has a will and should have a choice. Let her select him whom she likes best." And he smirked.

"Let it be done," all assented.

Rahuel made their decision known to the disconsolate maid, and she, indifferent to anything that might befall her, followed Rahuel, to be presented before the four suitors for her good pleasure. "Select whom you may trust the most," Rahuel directed her, and stepped aside. "It is not for marriage, but simply for protection for a while, until you may find a home for yourself in this strange land."

Nathan picked and pulled assiduously at his rumpled and ruffled turban and eyed Zoroith with languishing looks. Omri threw out his chest and straightened his biceps, looking the girl openly and assuringly in the

eyes. Zambri growled and groaned and put on the glower and frown of the warriors of their ancient legends, and Ben-Eder tenderly pursed his lips and stroked his disheveled beard with a movement of the left hand that was but a poorly concealed invitation to her to select him above the others. Rahuel looked on, much amused at the fervor of a wooing which inspired such grunts and grimaces, without himself experiencing any untoward sentiment, except a momentary sense of loneliness, which he scouted on notice.

But Zoroith wearily scanned these unsympathetic, selfish countenances and, turning around, threw her arms about Rahuel. "Take me," she begged meekly. "I will be all to thee that a child can be to a father. Refuse me not — I have lost my father — be thou a father to me." And when Rahuel, from sheer surprise, hesitated to respond to her pleading, she laid one hand over his heart and the other over her own and added sweetly: "This heart of mine I will lay into your heart, and your heart I will make the repository of all my prayers."

"Come, daughter mine," Rahuel replied, with undisguised resignation as to an unalterable decree of destiny. And he immediately departed, leading the girl by the hand, and wondering at himself.

The sore quartet also turned about, and with heads hanging low and brows darkened, they stalked away in the opposite direction, each avoiding to look at the other, and each unmistakably bent upon sympathizing with himself, without asking sympathy of the other equally discomfited suitors.





Chapter Twenty-third

THE SLAVE MARKET

MEMPHIS richly deserved the honor of being called "the Royal," in distinction from On, which was "the Priestly," and from Thebes, which was styled "the Scepter" city.¹ For Memphis, the most ancient city of the land, was the heart at the vital artery of Egypt. Built, as it was, by Menes, the first king of the Nile valley, and graced with his name, its history, as that of the monument of the sum of the power, the art, the architectural skill, and the wealth of many centuries, extended far back into dim antiquity and was buried in the ruins of a type of architecture and sculpture of which sufficient traces survived to point out its soberness and simplicity. Its colossal main temple of P'tah, a structure patterned after the grandeur of the mighty universe, stood hard upon the border of the still desert and held up its lotus-crowned columns like the arms of a giant towards the heavens, as an homage to the "Lord of Truth." Right and left of its lofty portals posed the statues of forgotten kings, hewn from indestructible stone, which looked down as fixedly as the irrevocable past, of which they had been the makers and witnesses, upon the new and active presence. On the rugged shoulders of these stone monarchs

¹ *Uas*: Scepter; one of the ancient Egyptian names of Thebes.

reposed the architraves and arches, which in turn supported the massive and expansive superstructure, a temple for a roof upon a temple. Walls and pillars, pilasters and buttresses, cornices, panels, and bases were covered, up and down their height and width, with mysterious characters of pictured writing, telling to the passing generations the legend of the heroic deeds of their fathers. The brightness of sunlight perpetually dwelt in these deep and lofty halls, which were decorated in vivid colors, and on the walls of which again were reproduced with reverent style and pencil the laws of olden days, the enactments of kings now believed to be mythical, the moral precepts of a stern priestly caste of old, the decisions of famous judges, and the record of memorable events and of the deeds and feats of many generations now long since asleep in the surrounding silent cemeteries. The shadow of the eternal, of the infinite and imperishable, pervaded their hallowed chambers as with the suggestion of fragrant incense burnt before the throne of the Almighty, in whose honor this magnificent edifice had been reared.¹

Beginning at the temple, the city spread out like a fan towards the bank of the sacred river. About the royal palace, which formed a city by itself, were grouped the residential and administrative quarters of the officials of the pharaoh, the royal granaries, which were the state treasury, the bakery and winehouse of the Court, the dwellings of an army of servants and slaves, the stalls and sheds for the fatlings and the beasts of burden, and for the chariots of the courtiers and the chiefs of the police and the royal bodyguard.

¹ There is no doubt that in the beginning *P'tah* was looked upon simply as the personification of the Omnipotence of the Creator.

The several groups of buildings belonging to various departments of the administration were separated by beautiful gardens and artificial watercourses, and by long, shady avenues of tall trees intertwined with a dense network of luxuriant grapevines. At regular intervals on both sides of the main avenue, which descended from the great portal of the temple and ran the whole diameter of the city to the edge of the river, ponds were constructed which were radiant with the laughing blue, white, and crimson of the lotus flowers, and were freshened and cooled by the incessant coursing of the waters of the canals that threaded their way through them, passing from one to the other, like a silver string passed through the sparkling azure beads of a necklace.

The "Double High House," the residence of the pharaoh, occupied the center both of the city and of the lesser circle of the governmental section. The dwellings of the laborers and of the cattlemen also were situated within the city walls, and although they were not in use except for a few weeks during the year, or in times of war, they were guarded and kept in repair in order to preserve them from falling into ruins. They rather presented the appearance of cozy hermitages snuggling in the shade and foliage of the lanes than of vacant houses, thus serving rather for an ornament to the city than parading as a blatant nuisance. All the houses of Memphis were built of hard reddish stone which assumed the polish of marble in the blazing sun and under the grinding of the fine sand-dust of the neighboring, obtrusive desert.

In the northern section of the city was located the public market. It covered a large area, the border of which was studded with fancifully carved booths and

display-halls. In the center of the wide space the slave market was held several times during the year on stated dates. For these events, special arrangements were made. Platforms were erected, seats were placed in rows at convenient distances from the platforms of the criers and auctioneers, and canopies were built to protect the patrons from the interest which the sun usually took in that open space of the market, and in the exhibition of the more than half-denuded humanity placed on view for the haggling and bartering of their brethren.

For this particular occasion a rather more than ordinarily rich market was announced. "From all the ends of the earth," the heralds of Theman had cried through the streets of Memphis the day and night before, "from the four corners of the world, from Assur and Elam, from Ur and Babel, from the country of the Hittites, from the coast of the sea of the rising sun, and from that of the sea of the setting sun,¹ from the highlands of the Lebanon, from Naharain,² and from Chanaan the Blest, the very cream of girls and boys, maidens and youths, tender as flax and sweet as the luscious grapes of Hal, has been brought together for the delectation of the wealthy sons of Mizraim; also of men brave and true, and as healthy as oxen in the pasture, and of prudent and clever women who would fain seek a new lord and master."

The criers were light and dapper little brown men especially trained for their rôle in the tragedy of disposing of human flesh. At every street corner they had stopped and had garnished their threadbare cant with the gay ornamentation of suggestive notes and

¹ The Euxine and the Caspian Seas.

² Mesopotamia.

comments, which were boisterously taken up by the half-grown youths flocking after and swarming about them by scores, and loudly retailed in the farthest ends of the city. This shabbily contrived trick of the trade, of filling the ears of unsuspecting youth with information barely intelligible enough to them to arouse their curiosity, but indelicate enough to make them stop and gloat over the novel discovery, did not fail to accomplish the expected results. The market was made the chief target of the coarse humor of the beer-houses and the chief topic of endless and malodorous speculations by the patrons of the more pretentious winehouses throughout half that night. The sale was well advertised; at what cost to the moral health of the public, did not trouble the unscrupulous dealers in the flesh of their brethren.

Also the permission of Putiphar, the chancellor and chief of police, had been duly obtained without much difficulty. As he was an official not averse to accepting a bribe, Theman had offered him the best article on his list, an exceedingly handsome boy, whom the mighty chancellor, the "Right Leg of the Pharaoh,"¹ had singled out as his prize. The private sale of the boy was the handsel of the market; at least it was represented as such, in order not to make it appear as a violation of the law which made slave dealing a strictly public transaction.

Slave trading as well as every profitable industry in Egypt was a monopoly of the government. The state was the great common foster-father of the nation and more rigorously paternalistic in its disposition of the products of the land than any private master could have dared to be without risk of conflict with

¹ A title of honor of the captain of the bodyguard.

the law. Individual solicitude and ambition were stifled for lack of proper inducements. Hence the strange spectacle of general servility among the masses, of heartless tyranny among the class of the select, and of universal brutal worldliness throughout the wide range of national aspirations. Hence also the paradox of a more lavish expenditure of tenderness on the dead than on those living in want or ill-health; of the solicitude of securing a flattering inscription on the tombstone rather than a reputation for honesty and sobriety during this earthly life; of the fear of God — and the worship of idols. Hence the tragic show of the fear of death — and the consuming ambition of possessing a magnificent house of death, a pyramid, or a mausoleum, fashioned after the burial places of the kings. Egypt was still in secret drawing some of its lifeblood from the ancient traditions of a nobler faith, to which it clung with the tenacity of despair, even long after their supernatural character had been obliterated; and thus, in the lapse of many centuries, a strong discord had been evolved between modern views and archaic practises, the avidity of enjoying the fleeting pleasure of the hour having led men astray from the ancient ideals of ennobling and beautifying life by lifting up and embellishing the mind.

The reason of the failure of their struggle for reconquering the lost citadel of nobility and peace was by the man of the street either wholly forgotten or was, at best, mistaken for a fruitless effort of shaking off the trammels and fetters imposed by the iron rule of caste and king. The blinding dust of cherished new habits and customs that flattered both their ambition to shine and the novel tenderness of their senses was so thick in the air, and was so lavishly mixed with the

tinsel dust of pride, that they found it irksome to look back at the noble picture of the sobriety and sterling piety of their fathers. The impulse of a craving for a more rational mode of living could not be ignored, but it could be suppressed.

The most distinguished of the learned, the priests at the head of the schools of the great temples at On, Memphis, and Thebes, were indeed not ignorant of the head spring of the ancient traditional worship and belief. But they neglected to instruct and enlighten the people, and gradually fell themselves into the easy rut and trot which they had permitted their charges to cultivate in the practise of religion, and lost their esteem for the precious heritage which they treasured in the archives of their temples. Outside their city walls rose the figure of that mystic giant whom their fathers had begotten and reared, the Sphinx, the Neb¹ of old, peering unceasingly with expectant gaze into the east these many hundred years, brimful of the hopes of the past and certain of the fulfilment of his expectation of witnessing the *Rising of the Saviour* — and they knew of his enduring hopes — and in public offered their sacrifices, not to him, but to *Ra*, the sun-god! In the solitude of their private devotions they offered incense to Neb, with their fervent prayers that his eyes might soon be blest with the vision of the *Zaphnat-Paneahh*,² but in the exercise of the public worship they disdained to disclose the mysteries of the divine promise of Redemption to a people not interested in the uncomfortable worship of a God who claimed undivided and unstinting devotion and unswerving loyalty.

The odor of a pious antiquity came to the Egyptians

¹ The *Great Lord*.

² "The Saviour of the World."

of that period only as an unwholesome and unwelcome premonition of the vanity of this beautiful world, as a burdensome reminiscence of unpleasant soberness, as a monitor of the ultimate triumph of the Supreme Master of life and death, the only, true, and eternal God. But as light requires a sensitive object to be illumined and warmed, so faith requires a willing mind. It is not the naked thornbush, or the dry heather, or the dead and blind desert that responds to the magic touch of light. It is the flower garden, the smiling, blooming mead, the proud forest, the dimpling mirror of the lake, the cheery vault of heaven that together rejoice at the sight of the sun, and saturate its golden gladness with a thousand tints, and reflect it living and laughing upon its brilliant source.

The sense of responsibility had been so persistently retrenched in the Asiatic conquerors of Egypt that life meant for them merely an existence for the day, and that the purpose of living was to fill each day as the sun ushered it in, either with the labor or with the enjoyment of the hour; the day of tomorrow was of no account. Thus life was void of the joys of hopefulness, of confidence in the future, and, consequently, also of the cheerful striving after ideals elevated above life and time. It was this lack of ideals that permitted the Egyptians without a qualm of conscience to offer for public sale the unfortunate stranger captured by the licensed slave dealer; to hold by the favor of the law their living fellowman in degrading bondage; whereas the mutilation of a corpse, even of that of a slave, was, by the strictures of the same law, prohibited as the deepest disgrace and an unpardonable crime. Egypt was a child that toyed with precious jewels in ignorance of their value.

Very early in the morning, before daybreak, half the city was on its feet in the direction of the market-place. Many of the wealthy were accompanied by their servants, who were burdened down with the weight of chests containing the price of prospective purchases. But not all the frequenters of the market on "Slave Day," not even the majority of them, went out with the intention of buying. Men and women, curious, or worse, generally owned no other purpose on these occasions but the pleasure of witnessing the spirited tilts between the designing auctioneer and his close-fisted but covetous patrons, or of inspecting the handsome boys imported from Asia and the pretty girls intended for the households of the favorites at Court — of course only for the purpose of assisting the lady of the house in her multifarious domestic and social obligations; for the vicious Eastern custom of keeping more wives than one was as yet discountenanced by the law — even if not so much in practise, at least among the opulent. Then there were to be seen stalwart youths, experts in the use of strange outlandish tools, who often gave exhibitions of their skill or made display of the products of their craft; and maidens skilled in the subtle arts of spinning and weaving and fashioning wonderfully pretty ornaments of brocade for the heads and necks and bosoms of the extremely vain Egyptian dames. Such choice bits of curiosity, and many more, surely were worth spending a day in admiring, the house being left to the cat and the cobbler.

On the blocks and platforms in the middle of the slave market the living ware was already laid out, and back of it several rows of the costly stock were arranged on the stone flagging, every article of which was "fresh";

that is, young and neat. The droves of men who were to be sold as laborers were as yet kept in tents out of view from the sensitive patrons who would not tolerate the intrusion of a sad face on their contemplation of the charms of the young flesh that was destined for dallying and coddling.

The first row of seats next to the main platform was occupied by officials of the Court, who did not attend the market in their official capacity, and by several priests from the temple. Each had at his side a servant provided with the necessary pouch or chest, which contained "money" in the shape of disks, rings, or "fists" — that is, lumps — or nuggets of silver or gold of specified weight. The succeeding rows, which formed a semicircle in front of the platform, had been taken and held since midnight by the humbler citizens, who also had come out with practical intentions. The crowd of the curious sat, stood, or lounged about at leisure, at a respectful distance from the officials, but hardly in a respectful mood. Their estimate of the exposed "ware" was not unkind, but their "pity for the neat young things who were looking so hard a lot in the face" was expressed without reserve, and loudly and plainly enough not to be overlooked by the men who were holding "so hard a lot" in waiting for these "neat young things." How gladly would this one or that have allowed one of those prim maids to share his own "hard lot" with him.

The sale was opened with the display of a Hittite maiden of modest mien and manner, as slender and calm as the young cedars of her distant home. She was attired for exhibition. Yet there was nothing about her appearance that did not inspire honest admiration. Her garments were those of the select;

plain and simple, and of the finest material, without any evidence or hint of attempting to make an impression. Her lustrous brown hair was braided and the braids were laid close about the pretty head. Her complexion was as clearly white as marble, with the faintest touch of the roseate in her cheeks. The intent gaze of her dark eyes was restrained and reserved, as the gaze of a dove surveying a new mate. She was of noble bearing, a very statue of chaste beauty, as she stood on the platform, the object of the inquisitive admiration of all the spectators but the women. They could not be expected to pardon her audacity of wearing her loveliness and grace in sight of their own lords, who were nothing more than mere men. But as much as the women might stint of their compliments, so much the men felt inclined to superadd to theirs. If only their "better halves" had not stood so close; they were over-anxious to lend voice to their delight.

Among the women present were some who had been acquired by their husbands in the same way that the maiden from Heta¹ was now to be made the property of the most courageous bidder. Later they had been released from bondage and had been made the legal wives of their liege lords, and had not fared the worse for having been trained to be loyal and obedient. The Egyptian husband knew nothing on earth in which to take greater pride than his loyal and loving spouse, and of women, he preferred the well-turned, comely, and sympathetic maids from Asia to any and all of the domestic supply.

The auctioneer turned the girl around, showing her also from the two sides and from the back, much in

¹ The land of the Hittites: Upper Syria.

the manner that a coat might be turned over for examination. The crowd became enthusiastic; at least the unmarried young men gave vent to their appreciation of the obliging vendor. Several voices were heard above the hum of approbation. "What shall she be worth?" one inquired diffidently. "Three hundred crocks of wine!" shouted another. But the stolid auctioneer took no notice of these signs of impatience coming from the impecunious. He was aiming at the patrons in the first seats, among whom he had recognized Pent-Amen, the steward of the wine at the High House, who seemed to be unconscious of his staring and gaping until he caught the maiden's glance, or rather, until she fixed her eyes on him with a most timid venture of a smile. It made him leap from his seat, and he waved his right arm at the tantalizer on the platform. But the auctioneer responded instantly.

"What would a *connoisseur* offer as a fit price for so sweet and fine and proud a maid?" he cackled, looking over Pent-Amen's head into the vacant air and pulling at the girl's attire as if to arrange it for a more tempting presentation.

"Two dromedaries!" a deep, strong voice responded.

Instantly every neck was stretched and craned in the direction of the man who was so mad as to expect to buy the exquisite Hittite for a pair of beasts. Even Theman, who was supervising the transaction from an open booth erected in the rear of the platform, a sort of cabinet for gathering in and making safe the profits, raised his shrewd beady eyes from his list. The man who had made the ridiculous offer was standing in the second tier. He was, therefore, not one of the officials at Court. But his appearance was stamped

with a distinction that would have sat well on a courtier. He was as black as jet, of tall and robust build, and honesty and uprightness were the seal of his dusky countenance.

"The Prince of Punt!" was the word that reverently ran the round of the gathering. The vendor caught the name and hastily wiped an ironical smile from his face. This friend and ally of the pharaoh must be treated with respect. The Midianites knew that the Prince of Punt had fought many a victorious battle for Egypt, and had at any time free access to the royal Court, and even to the sacred presence of the king.

"Gaad!" Theman hissed at the confused auctioneer, "I shall give you the whip unless you sell the girl for the price of a hundred camels!"

"Two dromedaries — dromedaries, two!" Gaad drawled absent-mindedly; Theman was the man to make good his word. But there was no more response from the audience. For although "two dromedaries and a girl" made a ludicrous comparison, still two Nubian dromedaries represented a princely value. Whoever was in a position to turn two of these fine beasts into gold and add a small sum in the sure event of competition was not a poor man.

The girl showed signs of distress. Whether at the possibility of becoming the property of a black man, or at the dishonor of being held out for exchange for two — or for that matter for a hundred — beasts, it was hard to say; but her brow was overcast with a shadow and her lips quivered with the threatening of tears. Pent-Amen was so intent upon watching her, after he had again sat down in order to give the powerful black prince the honor of precedence, that the

auctioneer was forgotten. But the Prince of Punt did not resume his seat. He had issued his challenge and was determined to press it home.

"Two dromedaries," Gaad again twanged out, but was savagely interrupted by Theman's angry warning: "If you keep on riding your '*two dromedaries*,' you will ride them to death. Go on, you rattle-pated son of a windmill, lest we shall be haggling about this girl until tonight and be forced off the market empty-handed by the bailiffs of the 'thrice' Double High House, or by the henchmen of his Highness, the Right Leg of the Pharaoh!"

The warning took effect and Gaad trumpeted: "Two — two — two — !" But under his breath he muttered: "If we cannot soon sell her, we shall have to receive a messenger from the pharaoh; that would settle all our trouble with *her*."

At that juncture, however, Pent-Amen again arose and stepped out of his seat, evidently resolved to have his will against all contestants. The girl deciphered as much from his defiant attitude and his fiery eyes. "Ten fists of gold!" he cried. There was a hush over the excited crowd. Ten fists of gold was the price of fifty dromedaries.

"A barrel of balsam!" returned the black prince.

"Twenty fists of gold!" countered Pent-Amen.

The girl smiled at him, laid a hand on her heart, and gracefully bowed towards him. His victory was insured. "Twenty fists" was two hundred pounds of gold, a sum so large that none could command it without notice but a man of princely estate and princely connection.

"Twenty fists of gold," Gaad repeated, playfully measuring and dragging his words in the sing-song

fashion of little children unconsciously chanting, in every imaginable mode and with quite unimaginable persistence, the same words a thousand times. The courage of the black prince was wilting. He sat down with a dubious wink at the presumptuous young man, the minister of the royal bowl. Nor did anyone else arise to rival the fortunate scion of P'tehebra, the Prince of the North.

"A very jewel of a girl," Gaad continued to sing, patting her shoulders; "an ornament for the house of a governor; an incipient queen! Twenty fists of gold!" A short pause of expectancy, and "She is yours!" he concluded, and led the girl to the steps descending from the front of the platform. Pent-Amen rushed up, eager to receive her. She could not misunderstand the meaning of his zeal. Hence with a light-hearted laugh she sprang into his arms. The spectators applauded vociferously, and Pent-Amen led her to his seat, to give her in charge of his servants, while he would settle his account with Gaad's energetic chief.

At Theman's booth the deal did at first not seem to come to an easy and satisfactory conclusion. Pent-Amen's total capital consisted in five fists of gold, which he handed over to the greedy trader. But as that was only one fourth of the price of the purchase, Theman looked a bit annoyed. "Whence will you obtain the balance?" he submitted humbly. "You know, noble son of P'tehebra, that paper is of no use to us. We must go home again, after new business."

"But you do not think," replied the happy young man lightly, "that I take two hundred pounds of gold to market, just for the purpose of humoring such thieves as you? Here is my seal, and if you insist, I will procure

the seal of my friend Ai-defa,¹ the minister of the loaves. The rest of the price will be paid into your hand at my house. Will you trust us, or would you have us leave our coats with you for a pledge?"

This was bold language to use towards so crafty and so much humored a man as Theman, the confidant of every man of position who either was now or had in the past been planning an expansion of his marital felicity. Yet Theman never flinched. Pent-Amen also had a hold on many a man of position in the house of the King. So he wrote out his pledge and sealed it with his official signet ring, Ai-defa adding his name and seal as security. Theman bowed so low in acknowledgment of the *noblesse* of the twain royal chamberlains that his beard touched the tops of his goat leather boots — and that the scorn on his rugged and hard old face was concealed from their scrutiny. Then he folded the precious document and carefully hid it in his bosom. The steward of the royal cup was a most valuable debtor, who might on occasion be worth more than fifteen pounds of gold to a man of Theman's tricks and tastes.

By this time Pent-Amen's car of state had been made ready. It was a large carriage, the wheels and body of which were wrought of bronze, covered with tastily arranged filigraned and vermiculated ornaments of silver. It was drawn by two pairs of fiery black horses and guided by a stalwart black youth. Pent-Amen led the Hittite maid to the car and assisted her in mounting the high seat under the gaily striped and frilled byssus canopy. Then he dismissed the driver and, taking up the lines, urged the proud and restive team with a prod from the handle of the whip,

¹ *Ai-defa*: literally: "Food comes"; the royal steward of the bread; the "Baker."

and flew and tore away at a mad pace, amid the thunderous applause of the crowd.

Meanwhile the market proceeded with varying interest to both the patrons and the spectators. But the pleasure provided by the offer of the beautiful and modest maiden from Heta, and by the spirited competition between the black military chief and the youthful and daring butler of the pharaoh, was nevermore repeated throughout the long day. Towards the end the general interest flagged so much that men were sold in groups of half-dozens to the "grand and high masters"¹ of the building trade to be employed in repairing or rebuilding the royal granaries at the various stations up and down the river, or in constructing mausolea for the rich, in repairing dams and reservoirs, or at some other of the manifold tasks which were committed to the government architects. These men had voluntarily come into the Land of Plenty and had applied for Theman's assistance in his official capacity of licensed slave dealer only because by his good offices they could avoid the annoyances and delays to which intending immigrants were subjected by the official guards at the borders. Many also, if not most of the girls, among whom was to be numbered the Hittite girl, and all the young men, had offered themselves to Theman for the same reason as articles of trade. Nearly all these young and sprightly folk were accomplished artisans, eager to profit by the favorable conditions of living and rising in Egypt. It was a tame prophecy to tell these young people that probably in less than five years not one of them would remain in bondage to his or her master, but would rejoice in a liberty so valuable, at least in a material sense, that it

¹ Official title of the architects.

was not too dearly bought by a few years of training and trial.

The tribe of the Hyksos in Egypt (expelled probably forty or fifty years later), although jealous of their conquest, and vigilant against fellow-intruders from Asia, were glad to receive their best talent, as well for the humbler arts and avocations as also for statecraft, from their own original homes and from the other provinces of the enlightened East. They themselves had their hands full with the trouble of curbing the untamable element that had remained of the original inhabitants after the conquest, and with the labor of repairing the damage done to the whole land during a long period of incessant warfare and consequent neglect and demolition. The peaceful advent of strangers was hailed as a blessing. The wonderful handiness of the immigrant artificers in gold and silver from Damaskus, the rare skill of the flutists and harpists from Salem, the ingenious elaborations of the designers and the workers in clay and glass from Mycene, the deftness of the sword makers from Babel, the indefatigable diligence of the stone carvers from Pergamos, supplied a rich and never-failing stream of comfort and delight and provided the larger portion of the ease and peace of living in the Land of Plenty.

Pent-Amen, in driving from the market with his prize, did not follow the direct road to the palace, but decided to parade his good fortune through the streets. Now the whole city was awake and humming with the echo of fond neighborly salutations and the confidential gossip of the garden walls. The water carriers were coming up from the river, droning their monotonous lay of a prayer to Neb, to Ra, to Amen,¹ to P'tah, each

¹ Ammon, a heathen deity of the Far East, imported into Egypt.

according to his own religious predilections; or to Neith, the goddess of love and drunkenness, according as her devotee either was in love or had carried away a noisome confusion of the head from a nightly revel. The washerwomen also were briskly stepping to and fro, coming and going, some wandering down to the public troughs and basins in chattering groups, others going from house to house delivering the bundles and packs of freshly pressed fragrant linen, and cheerfully calling the names of their patrons into the wide-open doors, invariably adding their hearty "Ded P'tah as anhh!"¹ as a salutation, and receiving their stipulated pay with a gracious smile from the hands of the amiable mistress of the house.

The drivers of the sledges for hauling stone and other freight from the barges and rafts at the docks also filled the avenues with the noise of urging their slow and disinterested draft oxen, here with vehement snapping of whips, and with words and phrases of encouragement neither coarse nor yet flattering, and there with the application of such soft drivel as might not be heard anywhere outside a nursery. In and out the procession, the pedlars and vendors of a large variety of staple commodities picked their way; of such wares as cosmetics, wigs, switches, neck-chains, shoes and sandals, cloths for headdress and for girdles, and other toilet articles, which were all designed to captivate the feminine fancy and to coax a shining mite or two from the ample purses of the giddy dames and damsels of the opulent capital. It was the day for the periodical general market, where everyone was bound to be cheated and where the comfortable housewives concluded that they might as well be fleeced in the quiet

¹ "P'tah (the god P'tah) says: May she live! [the lady of the house]."

of their homes as in the turbulent market-place, certain as they were of their fate at either hand.

But such hubbub and bustle had not been anticipated by the happy owner of Binyah. She had told him her name and had recounted her life-story to him with all the simplicity and candor of a pure soul. She was the daughter of a chieftain, she had said, who was blest with seven other daughters and as many sons. "As our family cannot descend, at home," she vouchsafed to explain, "to the level of artisans, and we eight girls had acquired some proficiency in handling the needle, the products of our hands accumulated so rapidly that we were pressed for room to store them. Father suggested that some of us pack a team of a dozen donkeys and hie ourselves to Egypt, where marriageable maids and rich outfits in linens of all kinds and descriptions were more eagerly sought than among the staid Hittites. He said it for a jest; but I took him at his word, left home alone with a team of asses loaded with part of my possessions, and encountering Theman on my way, threw the litter of goods that I had left at his feet for the privilege of posing as a slave and entering this blessed land of yours. And my good star has guided me into the hands of so good and true a man as —"

"You," she wanted to say; but Pent-Amen caught her with one arm about the shoulders and cried into her ear: "Nay, Binyah dear! Into the *heart* of as good and true a man as a brother may be!"

But a love-lorn swain is not a safe driver of a speeding team. By that motion, prompted of his affection, the young man relaxed his hold on the lines; the horses shot ahead without check, and at the turn from the side street into the main avenue, which was closer at hand than he had expected, they plunged into a group

of hucksters who were in the act of crossing. The crying and shouting merchants of the street were scattered, rolling and tumbling about and littering the road with their hurtling and scurrying wares. None was seriously injured, except a girl who had been led by the hand by a tall dark man loaded with a pack of ornamental bowls, platters, and bumpers nicely carved of wood. The girl was knocked down and remained lying senseless in the street. Pent-Amen drove on until he regained control of the raving team. Then he brought his car to a stop, and Binyah alighted and returned to the scene of the accident. She stooped pityingly over the victim, and raising herself, after being assured that the girl was not dead, beckoned to Pent-Amen, who reluctantly turned about and drove down.

"Let us take her with us," she begged. "She is hurt and needs careful nursing."

"What is it to you," Pent-Amen protested, "that you should burden yourself with the care of a drudge? Leave her to her companions; they can set a broken bone as skilfully as you — if it is nothing worse."

"It is not even as bad as that," Binyah replied; "but she is bruised and stunned. Step down, *good man and true*," she pleaded with uplifted eyes, "and help me place her in your car."

"Woman's ways," Pent-Amen grumbled, but descended from his lofty perch. "Is there none about here to take care of her?" he scolded, looking around in expectation of finding a dozen willing hands at his elbow. But the spot was as fully vacated of the humble tradesmen at the sight of the car of state of a royal official as the barnyard is vacated by the flocks of sparrows at the dismal shadow of a hawk. Even the girl's companion was nowhere to be seen.

The lordly Pent-Amen, for sheer deference to the irresistible charmer he had bought unto himself, was constrained to lay aside his dignity and to stoop to the service of a menial. His labor was lightened, indeed, and seemed to be made honorable by the patience and solicitude of the beautiful Binyah, who courageously put her arms under the breast of the prone child and raised her up. The face of the girl was that of a foreigner. It was pale and a little haggard, as if from hunger or exhaustion. "So much the more reason for helping her," Binyah whispered.

After arriving at Pent-Amen's mansion and being immediately installed as the mistress of the house, Binyah confined her first cares to the restoration of her little patient, while Pent-Amen went out, quite ruffled and flustered, and related the tale of his good fortune to his friends and fellow-officers. "But she has peculiar tastes," he finished his vivid description. "A little training will be needed to take the tension out of her self-will."

"You had better make ready for the school yourself," one of his friends remarked dryly, patting the blushing butler on the back. This friend of his was a married man, and his happy spouse was also one of those fine and fastidious amazons from Asia.

Binyah's patient did not respond to treatment for a long while. Her injuries were slight, but for a contusion on the left side of the head. After more than an hour's application of hot wine baths and much friction and shaking, one of the eunuchs of the house, who plied the craft of medicine, appeared in the sick-room and ordered a bath of salted water, "lukewarm and stiff." This specific produced the desired effect: the abrasions of the skin contracted, to an ocular

certainty; the pain of the sharp salt solution penetrating into the fresh wounds was quick enough to make a corpse stir. The maid opened her eyes with a start and began to squirm and writhe. She was taken out of the bath and rubbed dry, with cloths soaked in olive oil, and placed on a downy cot and covered. "Are you my father?" she queried stammeringly of the eunuch; "and are you my sisters?" she asked with a shudder of fever of the solicitous Binyah: she was delirious.

"What is your name, poor worm?" compassionately inquired Binyah, thinking that the girl might mechanically respond to so simple and frequent a question.

"Zoroith — Zoroith," the sufferer lisped, and clasped both her hands to her injured head.

In a week she was so well restored that she could have been dismissed. But Pent-Amen's bosom-friend Ai-defa, the royal baker, had taken a decided fancy to the strange girl. He had never had a sister and was pleased at the thought of how much his aging mother would delight in having the service and the companionship of the sightly waif for a comfort of her declining years. He offered Zoroith a home, and she accepted with profuse and sincere gratitude.

What may have been her experience at the side of the uncultured Rahuel? But she never mentioned his name. Upon inquiring about her family and country she merely stated that she was "a bird flown across the sea with its nest at home deserted and laid waste."

She may have been familiar with Rahuel's purpose of life, his desire of revenge, and hence kept her peace out of fear of him; or was she prompted by gratitude not to divulge the secrets of him who had rescued her

from the perils of the sea? At all events, nobody knew that she had had a companion at the time that she was run over, and she did not think it necessary to call the attention of those so near the Court, the source of all "justice" to the wicked, to the presence of a man who may have had cause to decline proximate acquaintance with the official representatives of justice.

At the place of the accident Rahuel had been borne away in the flight of the mistrustful native hucksters. From cover of the arbors on the opposite side of the street he and the rest of the flurried flock had watched what was going on with the girl. When he had seen that she was placed in the magnificent car of the courtier, his anxiety was relieved and he uttered an audible sigh, at which the vexed observers of his interest in the child questioned him concerning his relations with her. "Nothing, nothing, sirs," he hastily replied. "But whose is the car?" And the natives enlightened him with their habitual officiousness, which instantly shrank at the shadow of displeasure from the towering stranger. "It is the car of Pent-Amen, the high butler of the Son of Ra," they said, and jostled one another in servile eagerness to atone for their false suspicion. "He is a privileged autocrat," added one; and another: "He is the son of the mighty P'tehebra, the governor of the North."

Rahuel slightly changed color, and shortly afterwards separated himself from the band of talkative merchants, and thoughtfully wandered alone, back towards the eastern quarter, where the shops and booths of the stone cutters and stone carvers occupied a large section within the enclosures of the temple. The other pedlers returned to the crossing to gather

up their scattered wares, but Rahuel did not even deign to look after his own collection of choice specimens of the carver's art; he had espied an opening to his course of scheming for the ruin of P'tehebra and of Pent-Amen, P'tehebra's favored son.





Chapter Twenty-fourth

"TEST-NT-PER-ANH"¹

THE lavish expenditure of Pent-Amen soon gave rise to evil suspicions of his honesty in office. Jealousy is the greatest enemy of the mighty. The women at Court, among whom the graceful Binyah moved with the airs of a queen, found it quite to their interest to belittle the foreign intruder on every occasion of her absence. Her greatest fault was her exceptional beauty, and the next greatest, her loyalty to her husband. Nefer-hotep, the wife of the "Right Leg of the Pharaoh," surpassed all her envious sisters in her secret abuse of Het-merit.² Her position, of course, entitled her to the special privilege of gossiping about everybody and everything with impunity. Why should she be the wife of the Lord High Chancellor, who in one person united the two important offices of the chief of police and of the captain of the palace, if hers were not the right to criticize those within the shadow of her mighty lord?

Lately, however, she had become somewhat taciturn. She no longer exhibited that cold-blooded unwomanly indifference to the tales that were said to be circulating in the city about herself. She had lost

¹ "Director of the School of Learning."

² "The beautiful Hittite."

her security. Formerly she had laughed down every ill rumor dragging at the skirt of her coat. But now she bent an eager ear to tattlers and maligners. Formerly she had been charged, in common with the wives of other courtiers, with nothing worse than the indiscretions thought to be the natural outgrowth of an easy estate and sensitive nature, such as were the enviable portion of those pets of fortune who lived and moved in the atmosphere of the throne. But now the nasty rumor was afloat that all was not right between her and a certain Hebrew slave whom Putiphar had advanced step by step to the highest place in his household, over the heads of all his servants, and whom at last he had made the steward of all his possessions. "That Hebrew is the most handsome man in town," the evil tongues made comment without prudence, justice, or mercy; "the old chancellor is too busy serving the king to keep watch over his young spouse"; "he leaves the kittens too much alone"; "Friends may not be man and mouse, although prisoned in one house" — "but the vivacious young grass widow is no mouse"; "he should have sent Joseph to the mines or the quarries — but he is a *handsome* young fellow"; "they will yet run away together and leave the well-feathered nest of the old Minister of the Sword for a cozy nest of their own"; "she has no eyes for anyone but Joseph". Such and many more were the ungracious compliments paid the high lady and her Hebrew steward.

In the midst of all these offenders, Binyah, the Hittite, was the only one that kept a clean tongue. But her abstention from slandering her whom everyone else thought it a virtue to slander was held up against her as a masquerade, as sailing under false colors.

“She knows,” the tongues continued wagging in the heartless circle, “she knows well why she should keep still. Her own husband has fallen from grace. Putiphar has wonderingly inquired of him whence he obtained the fabulous sum that he expended in buying that goose. And Pent-Amen’s administration of the vineyards and the winehouses of the pharaoh has been subjected to a rigorous secret investigation. Nothing has been found to be wrong at home. Now they will extend their search into the Arp-hesep, where the revolutionists are again at work preparing an uprising. There is a strong scent abroad that Pent-Amen and his wily brother-steward Ai-defa are in league with the rebels,” and such like treasonable insinuations were in secret advanced as the reason of Binyah’s reserve. That she might be inspired by a delicate respect and reverence for her neighbor’s good name, none was noble enough to consider.

A drag-net had indeed been cast out over the home-haunts of Pent-Amen. Putiphar was a good-natured, easy-going, able-bodied man who loved his comfort both at his own hearth and in the king’s cabinet. He was averse to the rivalries and bickerings among the officials at home and in the provinces, and ordinarily turned a deaf ear both to whispered insinuations and to loud complaints coming most frequently from the jealous wives of domesticated soldiers who had won a place in the peaceful army of the administrators of the pharaoh’s realm. It was necessary at all times to bring extreme pressure to bear on Putiphar in order to force him to proceed in earnest against any of the accused servants of the king. Memphis was quiet and loyal; what was the use of reminding the people that they could make trouble for the honorable “Right

Leg" if they would? "Leave the young man to me," he had counseled the accusers of the butler; "he has an honest and respectable father, which is better guaranty for his own honesty and respectability than you can furnish for yourselves." Somewhat rude after the fashion of the "circle," but none the less apt and, in some cases, quite pertinent.

Yet he was forced to act. For several years he had personally supervised the administration both of the chief butler's and of the chief baker's office, and had discovered neither lack nor leak in the supply and the disposal of the immense quantities of grain and wine which passed through the hands of Pent-Amen and Ai-defa. But neither had he succeeded in uncovering the mint from which Pent-Amen had drawn the two hundred pounds of yellow gold. In fact Ai-defa was believed to know more about the secret source of Pent-Amen's wealth than anyone else, not excluding Pent-Amen. But Ai-defa was the confidant of the pharaoh; a dangerous person to subject to suspicion and annoyance. Neither of the two most intimate friends volunteered an explanation. They could not but feel the atmosphere of reserve and ceremony which had gathered about them, but it made no visible impression on them in their official intercourse. They submitted to the regulations imposed on their service by the almighty Putiphar as a matter of course, and persevered in their silence about their private and domestic affairs, which were not to be exposed to the gaze of the scandal-hungry coterie at the "High House."

Ai-defa had married Zoroith. And he had taken this step in defiance of the soft urgency of many a mother who should have gloried in seeing her own daugh-

ter enthroned in the heart and the house of the chief Minister of the Loaves. But the lovable girl from across the sea had won the baker's heart from the first meeting after her recovery in Pent-Amen's house. Binyah and Zoroith were neighbors and friends to such a degree of intimacy that they passed for sisters, being inseparable companions and of one mind concerning the proprieties to be observed by women of their station of life, and more especially concerning the much neglected proprieties of wifehood. It had been blowing wind into the storm for the rash young man to put aside the offers of so many fond and designing mothers by elevating another stranger of the indisputable delicacy of Pent-Amen's "foreign goose" above all the aspiring native maidens. But he was willing to brave the storm. And a lively whirlwind it was in the midst of which he established his home with the confiding daughter of the Arab chieftain.

The first general swoop on the city for evidence against the suspected stewards resulted in bringing to light a secret society of students sailing under the banner of patriotism. These easily fired youths had been discovered singing the songs of the heroic ancient empire and delivering themselves, within the sacred precincts of their regular and common haunt in the winehouse near the school, of sentiments sounding the more treasonable the more fervidly they were expressed in the aging idiom of the glorious past. But the practical and unimpressionable Putiphar, before whose tribunal they had been presented for a hearing, bade them sing the songs and speak the speeches again in his presence, and was so pleased with the zeal of the hopeful youngsters for the freshening up of the scant relics of a noble age that in the end he joined them with

delivering the panegyric which one of the old kings had addressed on his wedding day to Hathor.¹ Putiphar had learned it by heart in his own schooldays, and had nearly forgotten it in the bustle of his public career. "I am pleased to the core of my heart," he said, "to see the young turn to their fathers for a pattern of life. Go, and sing, and be happy! Traitors are not merry enough to sing." And with that compliment he dismissed them.

In union with the students there was dragged out a curious specimen of a conspirator in the shape of a man of middle age, of pronouncedly strong features, clean shaven from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck and the pit of his throat; not a bit confused at his arrest, and on terms of intimacy with the students of the *Per-anh*.² He was detained for a separate hearing. Putiphar had him taken aside into a private chamber, where he afterwards joined him for a closer inspection.

The man did not at first make a favorable impression. His clothing was that of a man of caste, but was so severely plain that the inquisitive chancellor scanned it attentively and discovered that it bore the needle marks of ornaments, such as borders and spangles, which had been ripped off without regard to neatness. The coat was that of a director of studies, immaculately white, ample, and of the best material. The wig, which the delinquent held in his hand, and the artificial beard, which protruded from the bosom of his coat, were well groomed, curled, and combed, of the venerable gray affected by men of dignity and consequence. The long nether garment, which was

¹ The Juno of Egypt.

² The "high school," "the school of learning."

in part exposed through the gaps of the somewhat disheveled coat, still showed the original decorations of a bright red hem and alternating stripes of red and orange on the white ground which lay between the stripes at even distances. His shoes were of white goat leather, but consisted merely of a sole, a strap across the instep, and a loose, purse-shaped tip, a pocket for the toes. His legs were bare. Such presentation of the "hawk caught with the starlings" was too uncommon, mainly because of its lack of harmony, not to arouse interest.

"Who are you?" was naturally the first question of the inquisitor.

"I am Raca-el,"¹ answered the captive irreverently and sarcastically.

"Not much news in this name," sneered Putiphar. "Every thief can affect the fool. Your home?"

"With the students."

"Your trade?"

"Stone-cutter; employed at the temple booths."

"Your intentions?"

"None."

"Rich?"

"Some."

"Your nationality?"

"Not worth a breath."

"Where were you born?"

"Across the water."

"How came you here?"

"By mistake."

"How now?"

"I was taken up by mistake for a plotter against the Double High House."

¹ *Raca-el* is literally: "The fool of God."

Putiphar laughed; the whimsical accuracy of the lodger of the students amused him.

"Will you tell me what precisely brought you down to our blessed land from over the water?" he elucidated his query.

"I came down to seek a field for my skill."

"From Babel or from Ur?"

Should Rahuel tell the truth? No; it would incapacitate him for a prospective higher career. He must remain under cover.

"From Ur, you most honorable Right Leg of the great pharaoh," he answered with the ambiguous accents of a concealed sense of superiority.

"Learned?"

"A little."

"I like the modesty of able men," Putiphar observed broadly. "What may your purpose be with the boys at the school?"

"I assist them now and then with their problems."

"Then go back and be a father to the noble band of seekers after wisdom."

Rahuel was dismissed, and the chancellor had again acquitted himself of an irksome but necessary task. But the moment that Rahuel turned to leave, Putiphar remembered the gross incongruity of the apparel of the "learned Chaldean." The mutilation of the distinguished garb of a school director was cryingly apparent from the rear, where the covered nether coat could not serve as a relieving feature. He recalled Rahuel and took him to task for his disreputable attire.

"If you are one of the learned men of Ur," he blustered sympathetically, "why do you not assume a respectable garb?"

"Because I have no permission, you honorable Right Leg of the great pharaoh," Rahuel stammered affectedly, "to wear the garb of the wise men in this blessed land of yours."

"I give you permission," the chancellor assured him, with much satisfaction at being able to assist so humble a man. Then he scrawled a line or two of awkward characters on a sheet of parchment, sealed it with his ring, and handed it to the wondering schoolmaster. Rahuel bowed low, dumb with wonderment at the gullibility of the "Right Leg," and departed, half a head taller from—he did not know was it pride, pleasure, or surprise.

But Putiphar sent one of his assistants after him, secretly to shadow him and to test his abilities at the rendezvous of the students. This after-thought of the chancellor was the natural outcropping of his disposition to be indulgent. He had to secure himself against the results of possible mistakes through excessive kindness. The spy was a bright and prudent young man, himself a graduate of the temple school, who could without suspicion mix with the students, many of whom still remembered him, and would readily lend a hand in turning a trick on their mentor.

On his way to headquarters Rahuel stopped at a weaver's shop and bought many lengths of fine white linen for a gown, and many lengths of narrow binding for the official shaping and bordering of the gown, and a dozen sparkling buttons for the ornamentation of the gown. If he now could only find Zoroith for the making of the gown. But he would have it measured and fashioned by the master tailor at the school; a girl might not understand what was required for the making of the official gown of a duly licensed and

assigned disciplinarian at the celebrated *Per-anh* of the great temple of Memphis.

Rahuel did not go into the tavern. He entered the gate of the wide square of wall that enclosed the temple courts and briskly steered his course towards the residence of the head master of the school, in order to present his fresh credentials. The venerable old priest received him kindly, but looked him over rather dubiously. Yet the seal of Putiphar was genuine and the document authentic. What the thoughts of the aged philosopher were concerning the prudence of the official "Right Leg," as he affixed his own seal to Rahuel's commission, would have been interesting for the crafty intriguer and interloper to know; for the face of the old hermit of the temple was on that occasion not the usual picture of an even mood, but wore the wistful air of doubt and trouble. But in accordance with the dignity of his years and position, he silently performed his duty and waved Rahuel from his presence with as little compliment as could be conveyed by a nod of his hoary head. Still, Rahuel had not come to Egypt to seek the good-will of its people, but to wreak vengeance on P'tehebra, who had scourged him and his brethren. What cared the self-styled "Raca-el" for the snubbing of an Egyptian priest once that he was launched on the course of success?





Chapter Twenty-fifth

A SPY



I-DEFA, who had long been in close touch with the Patriotic League of which the body of students taken up in Memphis was but a blind or a decoy, and who had been informed of the secret efforts of the police to put their hands on the central spring of the movement, had made haste to advise his friend and colleague Pent-Amen of the activity of Putiphar's henchmen. At first both men, although deeply interested in the work of the League and in constant secret communication with the heads of a brewing conspiracy in the Arp-hesep, were at sea as to the identity of the dastards who had dared to stir up to mistrust the artless Putiphar. They took up one thread after another, ran down one clue after another, but were brought face to face with a blind wall at the stone-cutters' quarters with every new effort. Every finger pointed to that spot; but that spot itself was deaf and dumb.

The artisans of the stone-cutters' court were counted and marked and shadowed; but most of them were foreigners, diligent and contented, and glad to be tolerated. Rahuel also was put under strict observation. But he, the magnanimous scapegoat of the students, the experienced adviser of the patriotic confraternity, was soon released from suspicion. He acted the part of a

jovial porter so well, that the students considered it an insult to themselves when they learnt that his integrity had been questioned. Innocent, confiding youth!

But from somewhere a tendril had found its way into the heart of the conspiracy and was feeding on its intimate secrets. So far not much of a damaging nature had been given away, but enough, at any rate, to cause unrest in official circles. The source from which that little had been drawn was filled to the brim with correct information; for it would have been foolhardy for a traitor or tattler to come out into the open with confused and incomplete reports, thus incurring the danger either of the noose for defamation or, at least, of losing contact with the center of the disturbance.

The first intimation of a serious leak in the conspiracy came to Binyah, indirectly, in the form of a letter sent to Putiphar's wife. This worthy dame confided the dreadful secret of a message, purporting nothing less than an intimation of Pent-Amen's conjugal infidelity, to the party most deeply concerned, and, in all probability, most deeply to be hurt by this unkind fling at her domestic felicity. The letter was composed of three rows of hieroglyphic figures reading in this manner:

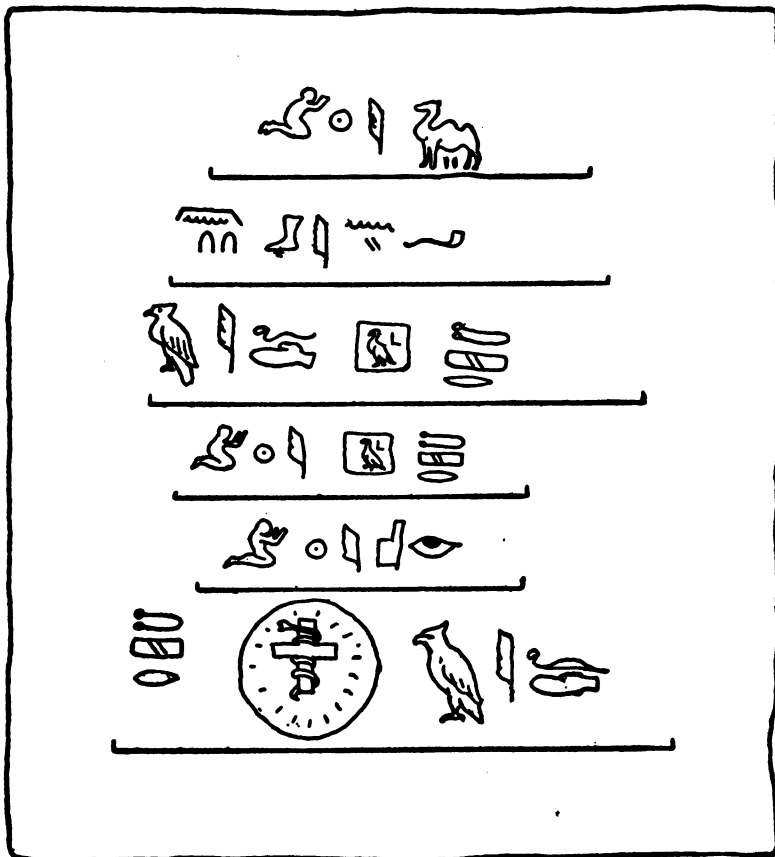
1. { "Pent Amen" — "Two Camels."
- { "Gold, Twenty" — "Bin-i-a."
2. { "Ai-defa" — "Hathor"¹ — "Zoroith."
- { "Pent-Amen" — "Hathor" — "Zoroith."
3. { "Pent-Amen" — "Osiris"²
- { "Zoroith" — "*Rahu*"³ — "Ai-defa."

¹ The goddess of love.

² Judge of the dead.

³ *Rahu*, the avenger, the fool; of Babylonian origin.

That is: "Pent-Amen paid twenty lumps of gold for Binyah, who was rated at 'two camels.' Ai-defa loves Zoroith. Pent-Amen loves Zoroith as his life (?). Pent-Amen shall face Osiris (shall die) but Zoroith shall be the life (or safety) of Ai-defa by the sign of the *Rahu*." But the second line might also read thus: "Were Zoroith Pent-Amen's wife, he should be spared."



The whole miserable fabrication was evidently the work of one not quite used to the pencil at so tedious and delicate a task as fixing living conceptions of the mind on parchment by means of a treacherous brush of camel's hair and in images remotely symbolical and intractable. But Binyah, instead of submitting it to the examination of her husband, who was an expert reader, brooded over it, wept over it, and pined away from shame at the patronizing compassion of the other ladies at Court, who had been informed of Binyah's misfortune by the archscandal-monger, Nefer-hotep. At length Pent-Amen could not but take notice of the change of atmosphere at home and demanded an explanation. Binyah surrendered the *corpus delicti*. Pent-Amen read and stared and glowered. "An imposition," he fumed; "the wretched concoction of a fool!" Then he laughed, not without some doubt and diffidence concerning the intent of the obnoxious missive, tore the parchment in pieces, and flung it on the hearth. Binyah brightened up and promised to forget the annoyance. But, womanlike, she examined the rubbish of the oven, when she was again alone, for remnants of the letter. She found the last line intact and exhibited it to Zoroith, making a special call for that purpose at Ai-defa's home. It was too precious a trophy, after her wise liege-lord had passed sentence on it, to be cast away without having stirred with its aid a little interest also within her own intimate circle.

At sight of the scorched slip Zoroith grew pale. Binyah noticed her uneasiness and inquired after the reason. "This," her friend gasped, pointing a trembling finger at the sign of the crossed bars and serpent.

"What is it?" Binyah asked innocently, wondering whether Pent-Amen had not seen it.

"It is a Semitic sign, the emblem of the secret craft of the priesthood of Babel."

"But does it not mean 'Life?'"¹

"Ay, dear Binyah. But why did the writer of this missive not employ the Egyptian sign?"

"I surely do not know. I will ask Pent-Amen."

"Pent-Amen does not know *this* sign. The original, the pattern of this sign, is formed thus [here Zoroith laid the extended index finger of one hand across the index finger of the other hand at right angles, and deftly breathed a spiral line along the perpendicular finger], "which the writer probably did not know," she concluded, quizzically surveying Binyah's admiring face. "It is used among friends as a pledge," she resumed after a little pause, "more sacred than an oath of living and dying together, or, one for another.² Our sheiks make use of it on rare occasions, as when they solemnly admit a worthy refugee from outside to the brotherhood of their tribe."

"I will ask Pent-Amen," Binyah again said confidently. "He knows everything."

"Do not tell Pent-Amen," Zoroith pleaded with her. "I will tell you what this emblem signifies in connection with your letter. It signifies that a certain Semitic friend of my husband wishes to warn him against your husband for the love of me."

"But is it not a foolish prank?"

"No, Binyah. Does Pent-Amen not procure the wine for the royal cup? And are the royal vineyards

¹ On account of its resemblance to the Egyptian *Ankh*.

² It should be noted that Rahuel used it as a pledge after the flogging at the salt lakes.

not at Thebes and in the Arp-hesep? And are not Thebes and the Arp-hesep the hotbeds of revolution? Now, Binyah, show yourself a true friend to me. Do not betray me, but plead with Pent-Amen to sever his connection with the traitors."

Binyah turned deathly pale. The slightest danger threatening her beloved Pent-Amen assumed in the eyes of her unmeasured devotion the form of the gallows outside the city gate. She was so chilled with fear that she could not speak. "Take heart," Zoroith comforted her. "This letter-writer is a shield of both these endangered lives of our lords, or why should he warn one of them by holding up the name of the other as a signal, when he must know that they are intimate and inseparable friends? He has done us a good turn, and he wishes us to find out whence the warning comes, even though we may have to wait until he sees whether we will profit by his warning; for this his sign is as good as his name."

"Who is it? Do you know him?" at last Binyah forced herself to ask.

Zoroith knew that Rahuel was the author of that letter. But she was loath to reveal his identity as long as he himself saw fit to remain under cover. Rahuel always had had good reasons for whatever game he played. And as there was a slight possibility that someone else standing closer to both men than Rahuel had sounded the alarm, in time to drive them from the range of an impending inquisition, Zoroith felt safe in making a round denial. But Binyah hastened home to enlighten Pent-Amen and to give him a sound scolding for "associating with traitors." Also Ai-defa was not spared a round berating by his troubled young wife. Afterwards the twain stewards put their heads together, and after carefully rehearsing all that had been said

concerning that unpleasant monitor, arrived at the conclusion that they had sore need of being on their guard against a secret observer.

Ultimately, however, the letter was traced to Rahuel. He was watched at work, and at ease with the pupils of the *Per-anh*. He showed great ambition to learn the reading of the mystic characters, which he engraved by the score every day on the bases, shafts, and capitals of columns at the stoneyards and, for exercise, penciled and painted under the supervision of the more advanced students at their taverns. But this clue, even in union with the other compromising fact that Rahuel was an Asiatic Semite descended from the Chaldeans, was insufficient for charging him in public with the authorship of that letter. The only interest which the public took in the rumor that "something was wrong between the butler and the baker" was the interest conjured up by the unsavory appendage of the rumor that it was "on account of their wives." Hence as long as the intimation of treason was not noised abroad, the matter could be left to itself for evaporating. But Zoroith fell under suspicion; her explanation of the note could not be called in doubt. It was borne out by facts which none knew better to exist than the two men most directly concerned.

A year after this incident another letter was found; this time in Binyah's bosom. She herself knew nothing of its presence in that strange hiding place. Pent-Amen drew it from concealment after he and his faithful wife had returned to their home from a feast in the palace of the pharaoh. Pent-Amen had been busy all evening pouring wine for the table of the king and queen, and Binyah had been left in the company of Zoroith and the other female notables at the banquet.

In the circle of the women many a covert hint at the year-old scandal was thrown out, but without any other effect than that Binyah was made most wretched and uneasy to the point of tears. Zoroith made several attempts to draw her away from the "bumble-bees," as she indelicately styled the indiscreet tattlers, but Binyah bravely stood her ground, fearing that in her absence both her own and her noble husband's reputation would fare worse at the hands of these inveterate slanderers. But when one, either emboldened or vexed at Binyah's moderation, loudly proclaimed that she would not hesitate to deliver her own husband to the noose if she knew him to be guilty of complicity with the conspirators, Binyah's reserve was shattered by the shock of that frightful threat and insinuation, for which she was not at all prepared. Uttering a short cry of pain, she broke forth with a gush of all the resentment that had strained in her bosom: "And I would rather betray the king than my husband."

The fact that she was not a native Egyptian; the fact that she had spoken under fearful stress of exasperation; the fact that she immediately added: "Pent-Amen has safely borne the life of the king in his hands these many years"; any and all of these considerations vanished in the awful glare of the crime of high treason. It was a capital offense even to mention the king's name or any of his manifold titles in connection with those of any of his subjects unless such undeserved honor was duly and humbly acknowledged and indicated — and this young foreigner, living by the grace of the "Son of Ra the Brilliant," undertakes not merely to compare, but to prefer her husband to the "Unspeakable Splendor of Ra!" And to threaten "*Him*" with treason!

The one redeeming feature of the situation was the coolness and conservatism of the great and good "Right Leg." He paid no attention whatever to the troubles that the women made for themselves, and was decidedly of the opinion that one of his duties of office was to keep his master from obtaining knowledge of unpleasant rumors. What could anyone gain by troubling the placid soul of the "Double High House" with anything but the necessary business of government? Before the feast was over, the fatal offense of Binyah had been whispered to him by his wife. "Take heed," he had told her, "lest they lay this at your own door some day. A woman who has not sympathy enough for a sister to condone so evident a mistake as this of the frightened foreigner, should beware lest she be made a like prey by like friends. Keep your tongue clean of the butler's wife." After this rebuke Putiphar's wife did not appear to be as much at ease as was her wont.

When Binyah returned to her residence she did not acquaint Pent-Amen with what had happened. But he noticed that she was not in her accustomed happy mood; he made generous efforts at comforting her with caresses and sweet words. She responded distractedly, with only half a heart, and was scarcely attentive to what was going on when Pent-Amen drew a neatly cased tablet from her bosom. "I would rather betray my king than my husband," the legend read in sprawling figures, of the type of the former message. At the bottom was affixed the same curious emblem of the mysteries of Babel.

"Whence have you this note?" Pent-Amen asked, holding up the tablet to Binyah after he had read it.

Binyah looked up. "Whence have *you* it?" she asked blankly.

"From out your bosom."

"I know not whence it may be."

"Read!" Pent-Amen said sharply, and turned the tablet towards her eyes. Binyah sprang to her feet, and fell fainting into Pent-Amen's arms.

The next morning Pent-Amen recalled that a certain tall, close-shaved man was engaged in cleaning and polishing his car as he mounted the seat in which Binyah was already ensconced. She had been escorted from the royal banquet hall by the aged director of the school, while Pent-Amen had been delayed for a while by his ministrations to the king, who had not been quite comfortable at the end of the feast and had required the services of his faithful butler in particular for the composing of his weary limbs. The venerable old pedagogue had also heard of the indiscreet remark concerning the betrayal of the king and was doing his best to dispel the apprehensions of the wretched young woman. He had repeated the traitorous words under his breath, as he had led Binyah out through the deserted portal, and had assured her of his assistance at the throne if, contrary to his expectations, the misstep should not remain covered. But from the shadow of that deserted portal, Binyah now remembered, the obliging polisher of the car had stepped out and had silently offered his services.

After Pent-Amen had taken council with his wife concerning these circumstances, he took also Ai-defa and Zoroith into his confidence, and at the end of their conference the butler and the baker with one breath whispered: "Rahuel!"





Chapter Twenty-sixth

A SUCCESSFUL TEST

IT was a few weeks after this occurrence that Putiphar had been prevailed upon by Ai-defa to have the guardians of the peace descend upon the students. The whole matter was prearranged, in so far as the Patriotic League was drawn into the raid. The object of the astute instigator was to furnish an ocular demonstration to Putiphar of the harmlessness of the existing federation of the academic youth and to quiet the mind of the public as to the rumors of a far-reaching conspiracy. The students had been instructed by Ai-defa to submit quietly to the indignity of arrest, and to entertain Putiphar with a reproduction of their classic songs, and to be absolutely ignorant and innocent of the meaning of such questions as might refer to treason or conspiracy. If only Rahuel could be held securely in their midst so as to be among the prisoners and to be obliged to face the chancellor! His peculiar position alone would render him suspected, and Ai-defa would see to it that he should be handled severely enough to make him out a criminal.

But the *coup* was too tame on account of the exceeding caution necessary to conceal its nature, and it blew over without leaving even the dust of its memory in the air. Rahuel had been roughly treated, as was

proved by the appearance of both his person and his apparel at the time when he faced the chancellor. But as he was too shrewd not to suspect a concealed hook in the bait and, therefore, had remained a passive figure in the game, Putiphar had rather been predisposed to sympathize with him as with one innocently persecuted for his love of the students, and Rahuel had come out of the mill, not only unscathed, but cleansed in the eyes of the chancellor for a long time to come. Why, he had even been rewarded for his fidelity with the honor and rank of a public official! All that was yet requisite for his full approbation as an officer of the honorable "Right Leg" was, that he should be empowered to use an official seal of his own. And that, Rahuel thought, was not far from actual achievement. Ai-defa had been grinding out the wind that purged Rahuel from all suspicion. He may keep on grinding wind and blow Rahuel into the royal palace, and even, if he listed, into Ai-defa's own coveted position. "Just grind and blow," Rahuel mused to himself, as he recalled the incident on his way to the tavern from the tailor's booth, where he had his measure taken for the new gorgeous raiment of a disciplinarian at the celebrated *Per-anh*.

The students were in reality only the dupes and tools of the crafty Ai-defa. They were admitted into his confidence only so far as to feel that Ai-defa was a promoter of patriotism among the rising generation of the future officers of the kingdom. True it is, indeed, that every sort of patriotism in Egypt at that epoch was suspected of and was actually tinctured with dissatisfaction at the existing conditions. The love of the *land* of Egypt was equal to an aversion for its *rulers*. They were strangers in the *land*, insecure except

through the power of the sword, opposed by the subjugated original inhabitants on every hand. As long as they remained at the head there would be neither quiet possession and enjoyment, nor decided progress, of the country. Everybody shared this feeling of discomfort; some with regret, others with exasperation. It was a period of social and mental stagnation. Could the rightful rulers of the land be reinstated in its government without a bloody revolution, the erstwhile conquerors could amalgamate with the original element and form a new, united, strong, and progressive nation. But the Hyksos kings were so strongly entrenched in the jealousy and covetousness of a powerful officialdom that an attack on the government would have to be made an attack also on all the resources — that is, the means of existence, of the whole population. Upon such a course, however, nothing but universal ruin could ensue. Hence the preparations in the northern half of the country for an uprising were merely tentative, and those who had decided earnestly to work for the destruction of the present powers had cast their lots with the uncompromising patriots of the south.

So much the students suspected. But Rahuel knew it to be a fact, and knew also that Ai-defa was the agent of the original League of the South. If only Pent-Amen could be implicated! The ruin of Ai-defa would be a welcome diversion, a by-play; but the ruin of Pent-Amen, and through Pent-Amen the ruin of P'tehebra, his haughty sire — what a triumph for the insatiable hatred of Rahuel!

But Pent-Amen had inherited no taste for intriguing and rioting from his stolid and loyal father, even though his father was of the ancient blood of the rulers of

Egypt. At the first certain intimation of the treasonableness of Ai-defa's connections with the South he turned aside his ear from the whisperings of his colleague. Rahuel's plan of forcing him to commit himself openly to sympathy with Ai-defa's machinations had produced the opposite effect. That first letter which threatened him with death had been intended to drive him into Ai-defa's net by promising him safety under the protection of Zoroith. But Pent-Amen was too straightforward and upright a man to feel the need of a woman's protection against a danger which would not be incurred but by participating in a crime for the sake of that woman and her unwary husband.

The second letter had signaled a real danger. If Rahuel had gained possession of proof of Binyah's treasonable exclamation, there was no doubt that he would make practical use of it for his own designs. But why at all tolerate the presence of this foreigner? Why not drive him out of his lair?

Thus Pent-Amen had assisted Ai-defa in arranging the capture of Rahuel. But he had also sought out the young man whom Putiphar had sent after the newly appointed director, in order to test his scholarly accomplishments, and had prepared a scheme to put the new academician to shame. He had held in his possession a manuscript, as old as the Sphinx, he said, written partly in the antique style of hieroglyphics and partly in the cuneiform characters of the sacred writings of Babel. Its deciphering was no mean task for a ripe scholar, and the attempt of giving a passable oral rendition of it would prove to be the extinction of Rahuel's rising star. He would be made the ridicule of the school and would be driven out as an impostor.

That evening Rahuel, who had no inkling of what a

surprise was in store for him, and was secretly nursing the sweetness of his victory over his adversaries, repaired to the tavern in an exalted mood and seated himself at a table alone, to enjoy in silent contemplation both his success and a generous mug of beer from Kedi.¹ At his entrance the students were gathered about the curious manuscript, which had been submitted to their examination by a servant of the chief director. They had spread it out over a table and were poring over it in the sweat of their brows. It was an enigma to all. Some passages they could decipher, but the larger part still remained unsolved, when one accidentally espied the lonesome guest.

"Here, here!" he cried. "Ah!" others exclaimed joyfully, "our new director! Here with you, man! Here is a nut for a veteran to crack!" And they pulled Rahuel to the table.

Rahuel solemnly surveyed the suspicious thing. It was old, yellow at the margin, and frayed at the corners. The characters were quite strange prototypes of those with which he was rather familiar from his daily work. If he was required to read it for a test, it was his undoing. At the head of the table stood Ptah-hetep, the senior of the school, staring at the inky confusion.

"We are required to read this papyrus," he began soberly and solemnly. "The patriarch of the high school of learning will have us decipher this legend for a test of our progress. But it is to us a closed door. The first two lines of this column at the right we have cleared up. But the third was probably written by a drunken scribe, who mixed up and dismembered his characters and scattered the mutilated figures about like seed in

¹ The beer of Kedi was as far-famed in those days as that of Munich is today. — *Heyes*, "Bibel und Egypten."

the furrow. Your wide and varied experience, your riper years, and the dignity of your estate hold out a hope to us that you will unshroud the mystery, if mystery it be, or uncover the imposition, if imposition have been practised."

At the end of his labored address he turned the foot of the document towards Rahuel, who was more inclined to roll it up and rap Ptah-hetep's ears with it than to undertake an "unshrouding." Yet it was a question of saving all the fruits of his labors so far garnered. So he concealed his diffidence most masterfully under the mask of dignified reserve.

"You have read the first two lines?" he questioned, looking them in the eyes with an air of kindly doubt. A round of nods of the attentive young heads was the response. "Have you read them correctly?" Rahuel persisted, with the same air of indulgent mistrust.

"Without doubt!" they cried.

"I should be pleased to convince myself of your scholarship by actual proof. I take note that some of you are a little tipsy. Would one kindly interpret these two lines?"

Now if the students had not formed a conspiracy against him for a prank, and would comply with his dignified request, he had already one foot on solid ground. These two lines must contain some hint of the nature of the legend inscribed on the iniquitous papyrus.

The first two lines contained the symbols of the following ideas: "Ra — Hand of Warning — *Ut-napishtim* — Flood Build — Ship — Seed of Life — Ship; etc."

The interpretation was thus given by Ptah-hetep: "Ra warns his favorite son *Utnapishtim* against the

impending flood: build a ship for thyself, and take on board seed of all life. And *Utnapishtim* answers the god Ra: I have heard thy orders and shall obey. But tell me what I shall answer the inhabitants of *Shurippak* when they shall ask me why I build the ship. Ra commands him to tell them so —” Here was the beginning of the third line and the end of Ptah-hetep’s art. Rahuel was to invent an oracle of Ra!

He had apparently listened to the interpretation with wrapt attention. In truth, however, he had put his mind to so severe a strain of labor as never before. The contents of the paper were not wholly unknown to him. They were a narrative of the Flood as preserved in Babel, or an abstract of such a narrative. He had so often heard the same story at home that he knew the Hebrew version of it by heart. He would venture a bold guess along the line of that version.

The students watched him expectantly. He smiled securely and condescendingly and drew the sheet on his knees. At the head of that obstinate third line, which must contain the answer of Ra, or perhaps of Beel, the principal deity of Babel, stood several foreign characters mixed with hieroglyphics. Here was the difficulty. This document was surely nothing but a copy and translation of the original Babylonian account. Hence these foreign intruders must be Babylonian signs and letters. These wedge-shaped characters stood about in rather disorderly arrangement, due, no doubt, to the inexperience of the copyist. Hence two deductions were certain: first, that he was confronted with the ancient account of the Flood — a little garbled, indeed, but quite intelligible; second, that the mysterious characters were the cuneiform style of Babel.

Having reached these conclusions, Rahuel raised his head, triumphantly scanned the tense countenances around him, and announced with the attitudinizing drawl of sublimated wisdom: "Easy, my young friends, easy, I say. The characters on vagabondage here are the wedges of the Babylonians. Here you see the name of Beel, the great idol of Babel, whose name the Egyptian scribe has transferred bodily from the original record, probably out of reverence for the old bugbear. Alongside his name is scratched the symbol of the Great Sea, and another symbol for a foreign country, which your scribe has fixed by adding your own native sign for the Wall of Exclusion. Now, do you catch the drift of the legend?"

But did Rahuel catch it? The "Wall of Exclusion" was not more exclusive of anything else than of himself. The remaining ancient characters stared at him with treason in their every turn. But the students truly pounced upon the papyrus. Oh, now it had been forced to disgorge its secret! The rest was easy.

"Tell the inhabitants of Shurippak," they read together, "Beel is angry at me. Therefore *will I go abroad across the Great Sea*, and no more rest my head on Beel's earth."¹ And Rahuel sat aside enjoying his triumph both over "Beel, the great bugbear of Babel" and over the men whom he suspected of having set this trap for him.

¹ Cf. Nikel, "Genesis und die Keilschriftforschung," p. 177.





Chapter Twenty-seventh

A SAVAGE

THE artful Ai-defa and the artless Pent-Amen were both disappointed at the failure of their scheme to entrap and ruin Rahuel. They had concealed the true purpose of the test from the students, being too much assured of the impossibility of a miscarriage of their designs. They had indeed reckoned with their adversary's handicaps, but had neglected to reckon with his inborn astuteness. Rahuel had once again deftly declined to be trapped.

Ai-defa convened a domestic council. He summoned his own wife, and Pent-Amen and Binyah, to meet him in conference at his residence on the morning of the second day after Rahuel's promotion. He was angry and disgruntled; in fact much too angry for a young man and much too disgruntled for a hopeful conspirator. His appearance on that morning was much that of a game-cock thrown out of the pit, not seriously injured or disabled, but defeated, nevertheless, by an antagonist so much its superior in skill, power, and generalship that a little fencing and feinting had sufficed to put it out of the game. He was ruffled and flustered and furious.

"Someone of this quartet is holding back a secret," he grumbled to himself, even as Zoroith parted the curtains at the entrance of the "hall of the goodman

of the house" and ushered in the portly Pent-Amen and the lithe and lovable Binyah. He was resolved to clear up the situation at any cost. He was no longer safe in his position, he so close to the king, and his intrigues leaking out on all sides. The man who flung Binyah's unfortunate indiscretion back at her on a tastily wrapped tablet must have his finger on the heart of someone near Ai-defa; and this someone, without doubt, was a woman.

After his guests were seated on the priceless rugs of the elevated square in the middle of the hall, Ai-defa addressed himself directly to Binyah, requesting her to produce that tablet. "It is no longer in my possession," she said, and pointed a finger at Zoroith. Zoroith blushed furiously and confusedly extracted a fragment of beautifully ornamented and polished papyrus from her bosom.

Ai-defa frowned. His wife should have shown him more confidence. He subjected the writing to a minute examination and rubbed his fingers over an erasure at the bottom of the paper. Then he passed it over to Pent-Amen, indicating his interest in the suspicious spot by a menacingly curt nod of the head and by flicking the margin of the paper with his finger-nail.

"It is part of the letter," Pent-Amen observed without exhibiting particular interest, and not a little piqued at the liberty Ai-defa was taking with their friendship. "Take it," he added, "and bury it in a heap of ashes — the only fit place for a piece of mischief such as this." And he handed the paper back to Ai-defa.

"Have you taken notice of this erasure?" Ai-defa demanded impatiently, pointing at the tablet.

"I have not," Pent-Amen countered in the same vein. "I wish it had all been erased ere Binyah wept her tears over it. Put it away, I say, Ai-defa! As long as it exists it will be a menace to our peace. Tear it to pieces!"

"Nay, my friend. It shall show me the way to the lurking place of a spy. That sign at the bottom is the badge of the traitor. Who erased it?"

"I did," answered Zoroith demurely. "It was a reproduction of the pledge of our sheiks, which might easily be read to mean that either I or one of my countrymen is implicated in this matter. But now you know that I am innocent, and of my tribe there is not one bad man on this side of the sea. Why should I invite suspicion?"

"But who else may be initiated in the secret rites of your sheiks? Your father and your sisters and your oarsmen perished in the water at the time that you were spared and rescued and brought to our shore. Who were the men that saved you from the wreck of your father's bark?"

These were delicate matters, and Ai-defa should more properly have discussed them in private with his wife. But his last defeat at Rahuel's hands had pained him to the quick and had humbled his pride by accentuating his own impotence against the versatility of the foreign vagabond. It made him set aside not only all prudence, but also all propriety and delicacy for the mere sake of fostering the sting of his defeat.

Zoroith declined to answer, and Ai-defa knew that he had the scent of the evil-doer. He glowered at the frail creature at his feet and stepped closer. "Was it that '*Raca-el*'?" he menacingly insisted. "Was he

alone? Who are his accomplices? He must have an ally in the South — he *may have an ally* in this house!”

Ai-defa was abandoning his reserve. The fear of being denounced to the pharaoh as a plotter against the throne, and the consequent peril of his office and his life, and above all the disgrace of having blundered at his task of assisting the present heads of the movement, who were to be the future heads of the government, were driving him mad. But his blustering disconcerted Zoroith so much that her reticence now was confirmed by her fear, and his cruel insinuation of the presence of a traitor in his very household, who could be none other than his wife, turned her heart against him.

“If this matter goes amiss,” he resumed, raising a threatening finger against Zoroith; “if this matter is carried before the face of the king — Zoroith, much as I love you — it shall be your death! Speak, then, woman! Who are the men that rescued you from the sea?”

But when he had scarcely finished, and before Zoroith could make answer, Pent-Amen and Binyah had arisen, ready to leave. “If you will disgrace your own house,” Pent-Amen said, “do it in secret. Come, dove,” he said fondly to Binyah, and took her hand. Ai-defa was speechless with anger. He stretched out a hand after the retreating colleague, grasping the air in blind rage. “Stay!” he bellowed, after several vain efforts at making a mannerly request. “Are you also become false?”

Pent-Amen paid no attention to the fanatic, and Binyah beckoned to Zoroith to come with them. This patent rebuff only served to enrage Ai-defa the more. He sprang at Zoroith, grasped her with both hands at

the waist, and lifted her up, high above his head, in the act of flinging her on the hard stone floor. Pent-Amen released Binyah's hand and flew at the monster. "Down!" he thundered, as a hunter might roar at a thieving hound. "Down, beast! Shame on you!" And he clasped his powerful arms in an iron embrace at once about Ai-defa's head and Zoroith's knees, and brought the savage down full length on his back.

Zoroith's face was as white as her white cape. Her lips were dark purple, and parted as in death. When Pent-Amen had delivered her from the brutal clutch of her husband, she was unable to stand. Binyah took charge of her and placed her on a narrow couch, speaking encouraging words into her ears. But it seemed that the heart of Zoroith had more need of clearing than her head. She made no response to the effusive affection of her noble friend. She lay limp, loose, and mute, with her breast panting and her eyes tightly closed. Here, a soul had been murdered.

While this scene was in progress the gong at the antechamber had been sounded several times, announcing a messenger. Ai-defa showed no intention of arising, and Pent-Amen stepped out to receive the page. But there was no messenger to receive. One had been there, but had left in haste after delivering his message to the page in attendance at the vestibule.

When Pent-Amen re-entered he bore a package in his hands, of the same dimensions and make-up as that which had last been found on Binyah. He presented it to Ai-defa, who condescended to arise — a much sobered man — and to open the parcel. Within the delicate wrapping he found a card, plainly written with the following account:

"Peace to thee and to thy house:

"The report of thy faithful co-operation hath come to our hearing as a harbinger of gladness. As a reward for thy zeal and prudence we constitute thee the headmaster of the League in the Arp-hesep. Witness our seal. Do not detain the messenger. Encourage thy brother."

And directly below the official seal of Ra-Sekenen, the new head of the revolutionary movement, again was affixed — the seal of the crossed bars and serpent!

There was no doubt that the document was authentic. Was Rahuel, then, in collusion with the leaders of the inner circle? Was the warning he had sent of Pent-Amen's impending judgment to be viewed in the light of the disapprobation of Pent-Amen's remissness in the cause of the League? And did Zoroith really know nothing of Rahuel and his use of the mysterious badge?

Ai-defa reeled with remorse and dropped the card into Pent-Amen's hand. Then he went over to his aggrieved, his outraged young wife and fell on his knees before her, begging and pleading for pardon. But Zoroith remained impassive. She opened her eyes and turned them full of loathing on the miserable craven, but she did not arouse herself to any further protestation of her feelings. Her face remained as immovable as that of a corpse. She was more effectually dead to Ai-defa than if he had dashed her to pulp on the pavement of the hall.

Pent-Amen called the page. "Who left this package at the gate?" he inquired off-handed.

"It was delivered to me by a light and short man," the page replied. "He cautioned me not to delay delivering it to my master, and departed in haste."

"Was he a native?"

"He seemed not."

"Any insignia of estate?"

"None but the wig and beard of the men of leisure, and rich apparel."

"Of the city?"

"Probably not, my lord the Butler! His garments exhaled the smell of the oil and tar of the floating trade. He comes from without, from the river."

"Whither is he gone?"

"I know not, my Lord. He turned up the road of the temple."

Pent-Amen put the card in his bosom without showing it to Binyah. But she pushed an inquisitive hand after it, drew it out, and read it.

"Who is *his brother*?" she asked.

"I," gurgled Pent-Amen affectionately, and drew her to himself and kissed her as an assurance that he was innocent of the tricks of the disgraced Ai-defa.

"Do not walk with thieves," she warned him earnestly, "lest you shall hang with them."

"No fear, Binyah dear," he returned warmly. "I would rather hang Ai-defa than be separated from this my own lamb." And he impetuously caught her in his arms.

Ai-defa was standing helpless at the side of Zoroith. He loved that mite, that handful of ethereal beauty, that cloudlet of perfume. He loved her as intensely as he loved his life and honor. He would just as lief have cast away his life at that moment of fury when he raised her up, a victim to his madness. But now his sounder sense was returning, and he valued Zoroith and his life equally dear.

"A word, Zoroith," he sighed, "just one little word: pardon! I will pluck out my eyes and lay them in

thy hands; I will take thy hands and lay them in my bosom: but pardon, pardon me, sweet Zoroith!"

No response. Not a quiver of the eyelids. Not a stir of a hand. An artificially animated corpse Zoroith seemed, and not a warm-blooded, a gentle-hearted woman. Ai-defa rose to his feet. He stooped over her, resting his hands on the couch on both sides of her shoulders, and peered intently into her marble face. Not a move from her; and he recoiled shuddering. Was she bereft of reason? Had he made her insane by his inhuman cruelty? Time would tell. Let her alone. As it was, she was naturally disposed to be retired; she may be frightened out of her wits.

But she had not protested, objected, remonstrated with him. She had submitted to his savage, to his wolfish attack, without defense. One only look of horror, as of one trapped in fire, was her recognition of the injury, when he flung her up in the air with the rascally intent of spattering the floor of his hall with her blood. Then she had closed her eyes, and now there brooded in them the stare of death, but not the vacancy of insanity. So it was, after all, at the instant when he himself abdicated the office of lover, that she also had resigned her love and, to boot, her humanity. She truly had become a sphinx much deeper than the one languishing outside the city.

Binyah was still holding the tablet in her hand, wonderingly examining the curious "seal of the sheiks," while Pent-Amen was watching his distracted friend for a new outbreak of madness. But Ai-defa moved away from the couch, dazed and tottering. "Will you not seek to comfort her?" he said humbly to Binyah, taking the note from her and mechanically tucking it into his belt.

Binyah was never slow to lend aid of any kind in her power to those who sought it of her. She walked cautiously, almost reverently, over to Zoroith, and went down on one knee at the couch. She groped in Zoroith's robes for her hands, and found them both pressed on the frail sufferer's heart. She tried to open the tightly closed fingers, but in vain; she bent down her head to lay an ear on the silent breast for a sign of a heart-beat. But there was no heart-beat, no pulse, no warmth. That face was cold, the brow covered with beady perspiration, and the breast trembled and shook now and then, not with the healthful heaving of respiration, but with the spasmodic jerking and twitching of an occasional labored gasp, which was accompanied with an audible hiss of the blood at the convulsed heart. Here, injury had been done beyond repair.

Binyah spoke blandishing words into those deaf ears; brushed the loose strands of wet tresses back from that cold forehead; stroked those drawn cheeks and at last bent over and pressed a long and hearty kiss on those parched, purple lips: but all to no effect. The twitching of the breast recurred more frequently and passed over more violently, and a single stifled sob was wrung from that aching heart; but there was no conscious, or at least no voluntary response to that show of love's labor.

"If you leave her here, she will die," Binyah addressed Ai-defa, with deep concern.

"But what shall I do?" wailed the grief-stricken, helpless man.

"Call her maids and pages and have her removed to the gardens. Fetch out her ointments. Let her maids rub her with woollen fleeces. Up, Ai-defa, and save this precious life that has been the sunshine of your

own!" And Binyah ran out and resolutely sounded the gong a dozen times in quick succession, alarming the whole household and bringing on his feet every slave and other servant, bondmaids and bondmen, and pages and stewards. There was a rush of many feet through the house; a hurrying and scurrying, a fluttering and flapping, as of a roost of a thousand wild birds flurried up in the night. Binyah gave brief directions for the transportation of her patient, and followed the excited procession of the servants into the garden.

"Friend," said Ai-defa to Pent-Amen, after the bustle had subsided and the twain ministers of the king's board were left alone in the hall, "friend, I have done a blacker deed than treason. But who could have surmised that our relentless persecutor is in the confidence of the heads of the League? I will seek him at the tavern of the students and obtain an understanding with him."

"No; that you shall not!" Pent-Amen protested, raising a hand in warning. "Rahuel is informed concerning your work —"

"Why *my work*?" Ai-defa interrupted him with astonishment. "Is it not also *your work*, the work of the League?"

"No, Ai-defa! I have severed whatever connection I have had with the plotters. Rahuel is aiming his shafts at me, as his first letter proved. I know not what his reasons may be, but I can plainly discern his aim. He has done you more actual injury than me; but that is accidental, and owing solely to your haste and inconsiderateness. I am his target. Nor is it clear to me that the identity of the seal on this last communication with that of the two former proves his

fellowship with *your* patriots. Who is the bearer of this message from the South? 'A light and short man,' the page describes him; a foreigner. May he not act in collusion with Rahuel in order to allay your fears and to draw you on with a bait? Or may this messenger not be an ally of our antagonist, and may he not of his own authority have put his seal on the document in order to obtain feeling with his confederate? If you visit him, you may be playing into his hands."

At this pass they were interrupted by the entering of Nefer-hotep, the irrepressible scandal seeker, the better half of the right honorable "Right Leg" of the pharaoh. She had been out on a constitutional, and having heard of the severe illness of one of her many "bosom friends," the neat Arab girl, she had directed the bearers of her litter to divert their way towards Ai-defa's mansion. And now she came in as broad as daylight and as inquisitive and as receptive of news as dry sponge may be of water.

"My sympathy, Lord Baker," she gushed and spurted; "my deepest sympathy, upon my honor. But how has it happened? Only yesterday — or was it the day before yesterday? — I had the honor of a visit from the sweet young woman — Ah, Lord Baker, what a pity! May I see her? Can I be of any use in a house of sorrow? Where is she? O Ai-defa! Do not torture me with your delay — speak, Ai-defa! Where may I find her?"

"She is in the care of the noble Binyah and her bondmaids," Ai-defa answered the voluble dame rather dryly.

"And what is it that has brought on the spell? Is it very bad? It is not, Ai-defa! Say it not! It would

break my heart! But how has it happened? Has anyone done her harm?"

Now Pent-Amen perceived his opportunity both of crossing Ai-defa's plan of conferring with Rahuel and of setting the unscrupulous spouse of Putiphar on Rahuel's tracks. If he could engage her to put a bug in the ear of her poorly domesticated liege-lord, the archmalefactor would soon be stopped in the middle of his course. For if Putiphar was the "Right Leg" of the king, Nefer-hotep was both the right and the left leg of Putiphar.

"Would it interest you, noble lady," the butler answered with a graceful bow, "to know the miscreant who has done such cruel hurt to Zoroith?" Nefer-hotep's eyes sparkled with eagerness, and her anointed locks shook perceptibly with an unconscious little nod of assurance. "It is Raca-el," he continued, purposely mispronouncing the name in order to impress the cultured and well-informed woman with the ugliness of the title "the Fool of God," which she readily understood. "It is Raca-el," he repeated, after a short pause allowed for effect, "who has hounded Zoroith for many a long day. I should not wonder if he were setting a snare for her — you understand, noble lady? Behold here an aggrieved husband," he concluded, pointing pathetically at the confused Ai-defa.

But this news was too precious not to be retailed among her friends!

"Putiphar should have hanged the scoundrel," Pent-Amen resumed, emboldened by the ecstatic happiness reflected from Nefer-hotep's glistening eyes.

"That may yet be done!" she ejaculated, and flew out. One look into the garden at the unconscious woman was proof apt and ample of the truth of Pent-

Amen's narrative. She bustled about a little while, expressing her sympathy and her marveling at the "wickedness of men," and departed in her palanquin, every now and then patting this one or that of the porters on the ears or in the neck with her fan, to spur him on to a faster pace.

The next day Ai-defa was an object of much sympathy to all the married women at Court, and Zoroith the center of their sniffing curiosity. Another day later, the market women and the washerwomen exchanged their ungarnished views of the marital fidelity of the *haute volée* in general and of the Arab capture of the Minister of the Loaves in particular. Strangely enough, the person of the reputed assailant of Zoroith's domestic virtue did not interest the gossipers sufficiently for them to remember or to ask for his name. Thus certain of the lower circles stood agog at the juicy bit of scandal dropped from on high, without knowing, or caring to know, the reputed author of the bitter woes of a defamed woman and mother, so that Rahuel himself remained ignorant of the rôle he was then playing as the fan-wheel of the untiring windmill of rumor.





Chapter Twenty-eighth

SHADOWS DEEP

THE evening on which Rahuel was subjected to the test of his scholarship was a long evening. The hilarious students continued to stimulate and indulge their thirst until well towards morning. Congratulations were exchanged without stinting, and the foaming cup went the round of the table, like the enchanted cup at the secret worship of the far Eastern Brahmans, as the bearer of a bliss that at once liberated the heart and intoxicated the head. Rahuel remained at the inn in order to lend a guiding hand at the conclusion of the feast to those who might incline one way or another towards an exceeding affection for mother earth, or who might allow their vision to duplicate the everyday and common objects to be found in the streets, and intending to avoid collision with the one, that was an error of sight, would come in unpleasant and hurtful contact with the other, the product of a hard and unsympathetic reality. It would require a little skill to steer such unsteady craft into a harbor of soft safety such as a bed may afford to one bruised and beaten in arduous strife with the elusive demons of the bumper; but had not Rahuel once before guided a frail bark to port through the wiles and whims of a treacherous sea?

Towards morn, when the gray face of the silent giant, reared above the city walls, slowly whitened and quickened in the glimmer of the timid dawn, Rahuel set out from the inn, leading, guiding, and directing his uncertain company hither and thither, like a goose-herd distributing in the evening the several members of a drowsy, crop-laden flock at this house and that, to consign them to the tender mercies of whosoever may have been lying in wait for them with a jubilant welcome. The jubilation may not have been mutual in every case, but it was the best that could be expected under circumstances not very favorable to the early arrivals in any case.

These youths had come to Memphis from all quarters of the land for the purpose of learning wisdom. Some had obtained lodgings at the temple school, but the majority were obliged and willing to take lodgings with the keepers of large semi-public houses, especially constructed in the vicinity of the *Per-anh* for the accommodation of the studious fraternity.

The last to be deposited was Ptah-hetep, the president of the jovial circle. He had rented a comfortable house for himself alone, as became the dignity of a rich man's son, and had hired servants to keep his house in order during not infrequent periods of his absence on occasions of the nature of today's celebration, or of hunting trips up the river, or of rambles inland through the luring Arp-hesep, especially in the season of the new wine.

Rahuel opened the door for his most humble and submissive charge, pushed him in, and turned to leave. But Ptah-hetep made a clutch in the dark at Rahuel's coat, grasped it by sheer good luck, and drew him into the vestibule. "Sit with me a while," he pleaded

uneasily. "Sit with me until my agonized stomach shall find peace and my unsteady eyes shall come to rest. My head hummeth like a hive in clover time and my anxious soul laboreth to be delivered by way of my mouth."

Rahuel in all his dealings made no allowance for chance. He accepted the invitation with commendable good-humor and followed his groping host into a large chamber, where the dismal darkness of the cool stone house was scattered, if not dispelled, by the abject servility of a tiny oil lamp, which should have gone out long before midnight, but persisted in keeping alive by dint of sputtering and spitting its scant supply of fuel over the wick every time the flame dipped to die out. At a glance Rahuel noticed a small package lying in the dim glow of the lamp. It was wrapped in an envelope of hard waxed linen and was sealed with red wax. The stamp of the wax showed the clean-cut figure of a bunch of grapes, and a leaf clearly delineated beneath the principal figure and encasing it for an ornament. Rahuel was taken aback; it looked so like the seal of the office of Pent-Amen, the butler of the king. He reached after it, but Ptah-hetep snatched it up, broke the seals carelessly, and unwrapped the tablet inside. Rahuel put his head over the student's shoulder and read: ¹

"To Ptah-hetep, my favorite, as a memorial and admonition:

"I have heard of thee an evil report: thou hast left thy books; thou hast embraced pleasure; thou wanderest from tavern to tavern: the smell of beer hath driven away thy friends; the smell of beer every night! Thou art become like to a broken rudder which re-

¹ Conf. Heyes, "Bibel und Egypten," p. 180.

spondeth on neither side: thou art like to a shrine without its god; like to a house without bread! Thou art found on the roofs of houses splintering the boards; men fly thee, because thou dost pummel them! Break thy beer-mug, before thou shalt thyself be broken; before thou shalt be made helpless like an infant!

"Thy teacher and friend, METHEN."

Ptah-hetep read the letter over several times, until tears streamed from his eyes, which he was honest and contrite enough to wipe with the sleeve of his precious gala-coat.

"Right he is, the good man," he groaned. "My father has lately sent me an epistle of the same tenor." Then he sat down disconsolate on a low bench and with lacrimose tenderness drew Rahuel down at his side. "What shall I do to avert the ruin which is threatening me?" he wailed, throwing both his arms around Rahuel's neck.

Rahuel permitted the impertinent intimacy without remonstrance and counseled earnestly: "Put away your boon companions at the jug and cling to your books. The brief days of your youth are the season of sowing for your whole life. The most accomplished guzzler is your hero today and will be the fool of the world tomorrow. An intemperate man is unfit for office."

"But I am preparing for a public office!" Ptah-hetep exclaimed with a start.

"Then learn to be moderate in all things. He who has not learnt moderation becomes an exacting master, a perverter of those under his charge, a mad bull at home, and a roaring lion at his post of duty; a disgrace to his father and a traitor to his king."

"Is it not horrible, the havoc wrought by the cup?"

"The havoc is wrought by the fool who knows not how to use with joy the good things of earth."

"Am I a fool?" Ptah-hetep asked with a deep note of self-abasement and confusion.

"This question you are competent to answer for yourself. Your good resolve is sunk in the bottom of your heart, which eludes my inspection," Rahuel replied warily, not knowing whether his client had yet reached the stage of sensible introspection.

But the young man was coming to himself from all sides. A long pause ensued, during which he silently stared at one spot on the floor, evidently engaged in debate with himself. "I wish to make a proposition to you," he resumed at last. "You have gathered the experience of a sober and active manhood, which is more reliable than my good resolutions, which soon dry up like a pool of mud in the street. Be my guide and teacher until I shall have lived down my evil habits of debauching. My father's brother is a sub-steward under the Chief of the Cup, the noble Pent-Amen, and is deep in the good graces of the right honorable "Right Leg." He has prepared a place for me in the service of the king, and he will tender you a royal reward for any good office you may consent to exercise over me."

The promise of so distant and indistinct a reward was not to Rahuel's liking, but the prospect of rising another step in his ambitious race after a position among the government officials or dignitaries was too attractive not to fascinate his greedy vision. He consented to be Ptah-hetep's Master of the House and Master of Studies in one and the same person.

In the course of a few weeks Rahuel had contrived to

draw into the circle of his own light many other of the young disciples of the celebrated *Per-anh*. A more orderly mode of life, joyful application to their books, a marked improvement in their conduct, and also in their reputation, were some of the fruits which his clients gathered from his prudence, discipline, and watchfulness. The venerable patriarch of the school observed the change with gratitude towards the man whose fitness he had doubted and whose commission he had hesitated to countersign. Nefer-hotep heard of the compliments bestowed on the "serpent who had wound his slimy coils about the virtue of Zoroith" and was filled with passing wonderment; also the right honorable "Right Leg" was observant of the wholesome atmosphere created at the school by one of his protégés and winked at himself with satisfaction long anticipated throughout the cloudy period of ill rumors wrought around that clever upstart by the women.

An appeal had been made to Putiphar to put Rahuel in bonds for having shattered Ai-defa's domestic happiness. But when the chancellor required proof, and was asked to accept the bare word of Pent-Amen and Ai-defa and the gossip of the curb and gutter for evidence, he shrugged his shoulders and passed on to rehearsing the old scandal over the princely price paid for a Hittite slave, "by one of my officers," he said insinuatingly; "was it Ai-defa or Pent-Amen? That matter is not yet quite cleared up, and good luck to you if the Double High Son of Ra ever hears of the prodigality of his baker or butler."

After that rebuff the twain Ministers of the Royal Board thought it profitable to their immediate interests to undertake a journey. It was the season of the ripe grape, which at all events furnished an excuse for

Ai-defa's absence from service for a week or two. He had charge not only of the royal winehouses, but also of the royal vineyards in the Arp-hesep. Putiphar appointed a substitute *ad interim* for the official cup-bearer of the king and signed and sealed Ai-defa's passport for a leave of absence of three weeks. Pent-Amen had discovered a shortage of grain for the royal mills and asked leave to go abroad for the purpose of replenishing the granaries from the storehouses up the river. Also he obtained the coveted relief from the delicate duty of ministering earthly food to a "heavenly" king, who was at least so sensitive to possible culinary imperfections as if he expected to find a death warrant concealed in every loaf of bread and a free pass to the realms of his ethereal ancestors in every one of the many cups of wine which he required to keep his immortal and aerial majesty in tangible communion with his mundane existence.

At last Rahuel, also finding that he stood in need of a short spell of rest, and that his grateful wards could not but profit by an experiment of walking the path of rectitude alone for a little while, presented himself, first before the patriarch, his immediate chief, and then before Putiphar, his magnanimous protector, and requested the favor of a vacation. Putiphar benignly acceded to his humble petition, furnished him with a pass from the royal notary, and bade him a happy, hearty good-bye. "Whither?" he had asked the obsequious pedagogue.

"To the Arp-hesep," Rahuel had told him.

"Hunting geese?"

"Nay; hunting foxes."

Putiphar had understood the figure and had handed him a purse of hard pigskin filled with silver and gold

of the king's treasury. So Rahuel followed close upon the tracks of the gay brethren, keeping a considerate distance, so as not to impose his contemptible foreign personality upon the pair of noble ministers of the sun-born pharaoh.

Pent-Amen and Ai-defa were making the journey on horseback, unattended and unaccompanied. Rahuel had secured the humble and unwilling services of a large raw-boned and square-jawed ass from his old haunts, the stoneyards of the temple court. He remained at the distance of one stop, or station, behind the royal stewards, thus being in a position to take up along the way whatever impressions they left behind. But they must have been as reserved in manner, speech and expenditure as a pair of the disciples of the *Per-anh*, with whose periodical and almost chronic financial distress Rahuel was well acquainted; for the sweet odor of their gentility and condescension followed them, as the odor of honey and flowers follows bees, all the length of their journey. In fact they were too gentle and affable, Rahuel gathered from the startled admiration of the tavernkeepers, not to be contemplating mischief. It must pay him in the end to keep a sharp lookout on their proceedings.

Binyah remained at home. Nefer-hotep, Putiphar's spouse of malodorous fame for curiosity and tale-bearing, had no sooner learnt of the expedition of the two colleagues and friends than she made haste to put in an inquisitive eye at Pent-Amen's castle. There she found to her amazement that not only the virtuous Binyah, but also the ill-reputed — mainly through Nefer-hotep's own friendly ministrations — Zoroith, had been left behind. "Hm," she meditated aloud;

"of course the heat and dust of the road might be injurious to such delicate and dainty complexions. I will blame no man for having proper regard for the beauty and comfort of his wife. If I could only bring myself to entertain a like satisfaction at contemplating the dangers to a lonely traveler's virtue! Putiphar would not think of traveling alone, even in the service of his *Goose Resplendent*." ¹

Zoroith listened impassively. But Binyah took fire like dried heather. She was all inflamed with wrath at the supercilious air assumed by the meddlesome dame. She had patiently suffered many an unkind thrust in the past for the love of her faithful, loyal, and loving lord, because her fortitude was stayed by the comfort and strength of his sympathy. But now that she was smarting a little under the emptiness and cheerlessness of his absence and lacked the support of his sweet homage, she loosened and flung away the bridle of her anger.

"Pent-Amen needs no woman's skirt to keep him safe," she spat fiercely. "I would think him true and know him loyal, even if he were away from me for years, amid the flocks of tender maidens of my own country. He holds his wife too dear to cast a smirch, a shadow of disgrace, upon her wifely honor. I would not doubt him, even should I need to brave the tongues of a thousand women with one accord proclaiming him their own."

"— and you would '*rather betray the king than your husband*,' would you not, Binyah?" And Nefer-hotep flounced out in a huff, her transparent garments, loosely worn, swelling out like the plumage of a peacock with her haughty step and perky manner.

¹ A goose is the character for "Sa" (son); "Sa-Ra" is the pharaoh. A wicked little hack at the bombastic titles of the kings.

Binyah had committed another and more serious indiscretion than that at the banquet of the pharaoh. The latter would produce no harm, as it could be kept from the ears of the king; but this of today was directed at the "first lady of the realm," whose interests took precedence of those of the king, because, forsooth, both the interests of the king and those of this woman lay in the hands of the same man, who happened to be in the comical position of servant to the king and husband to this woman. And that made a great difference. Binyah would have occasion to observe the fruits of her haste growing on the head of her own good Pent-Amen. It is an honor to serve a good king, but the honor of asking the services of a woman is all on the side of the giver. Binyah realized later in the day, when she had recovered her natural calmness, that she herself had furnished the hemp for Pent-Amen's noose, if the excursion to the Arp-hesep was absolved with dubious dealings.

Zoroith had not noticeably taken part in the tiff between the two women. She had indeed not even kept her eyes on them after she had realized what must happen, but had looked out into the garden, lifting up the bulrush screen hung over the window of the prodigally appointed boudoir, where the meeting was taking place. When Nefer-hotep had strutted out and Binyah flung herself weeping on the bed, she silently tripped out through the rear of the house and aimlessly strolled through the garden. Everyone of the gardeners, all of herculean build and naked to the skin but for a reverent breech clout, showed her marked deference and respect. Everyone bowed to her as she passed, or remained in respectful attitude as she stood dallying with his flowers or picking a luscious bunch of grapes

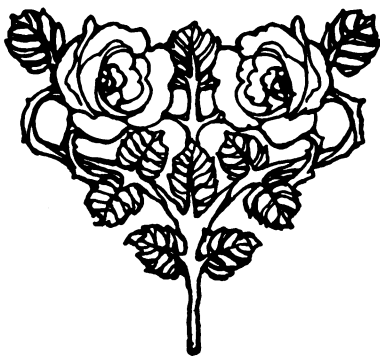
from his basket, to fill her cape with choice blossoms and savory fruit. "It is for her son," they whispered among themselves when she had gone by.

At the far end of the garden was a shady grove, almost as dark as night from the dense foliage of vines and trees, and as cool as a cellar. It was not large; just a cozy nook for a pair to nestle in, and make each other happy. The benches, arranged about three sides of a square table, were covered with leather hangings of gay color and odd, penciled decorations. Here Zoroith entered thoughtful, and heedless of her surroundings, and seated herself on a bench opposite the entrance. She spread out her store of the garden's yield on the bench, the flowers on her left and the fruit on her right side, and leaning back, covered her face with both hands and moaned and sighed at intervals as if her heart would break. But she uttered no articulate sound. None had again heard the sound of a word from her lips since the day when Ai-defa had laid violent hands on her.

After a while a trim black damsel came down towards the grove, picking her way through the winding paths of the garden. She led by the hand a little boy, who was toddling along cooing at the bees and the butterflies and stamping his feet at the large impudent grasshoppers that had the audacity to scare him. His brave crowing and the smart flapping of his hands to his sides, when he succeeded in freeing that which the nurse-maid was holding, sounded as uncommon in this abode of glad light and breathless stillness as the dreamy fluttering of wings and the twittering of swallows sailing through the temple at the hour of prayer. It lured a faint, sad smile from Zoroith's eyes.

She slowly turned her head towards the right of her,

looking for the tempting fruit, but — it had disappeared. At her left she found the flowers undisturbed. She arose. That fruit was gathered for her little son, the very picture of his vivacious father, and for the girl who was now taking the place of mother for him. It had to be found and restored. At this place the nurse-girl had promised to meet her and to conduct her to her home in the evening. She parted the densely twined branches and vines of the thicket in back of her seat; no trace of a thief or a theft. She pushed her way into the leafy gloom, the foliage closing after her like water over a stone. The little boy ran into the grove with raised hands and puckered lips and sparkling eyes and dimpled cheeks and chin, but there was no mother to receive him, lift him up to her lips, and kiss him. His smiles fled, and he turned a wobegone face and a pair of tear-bedimmed eyes on his dusky guardian, because Zoroith was not there.





Chapter Twenty-ninth

AN "IDOLIZED" MESSENGER

THE next morning Binyah received a written message from Pent-Amen. The bearer presented himself in the person of a light and short man, so light and short that Binyah was involuntarily reminded of the description Ai-defa's page had given of the bearer of the League's compliments, who had come and gone, now two months ago, like a shadow at noon. But if messenger this man was, he was a distinguished messenger.

As the most prominent feature of dignity he wore the towering curled wig and the rolling long beard of men of consequence attired for festive occasions. His face was darkish, his lips were pronouncedly heavy, especially the nether lip, and the corners of his mouth dull and flat. His eyes were small and deep set under bushy black brows; his nose was thin and hooked, and his chin — Binyah was curious of what kind of chin was covered by the artificial manly adornment of the lower face; his ears were thin and pointed, or, at least, standing up straight like the ears of a mouse engaged at thieving.

The kindly young woman surveyed him attentively, wondering what quality of mind lurked behind so patent a mask of mischief and trickery. The whole picture of the man suggested the weasel; but the

weasel sewed into the feather garb — head, ears, and all — of a dignified and ill-humored owl. The finery of ruffs, borders, bracelets and neckchain did not serve to mitigate the impression of the bloodthirsty little thief of the hen-roost, but rather to heighten the effect of short-necked, bull-head arrogance and persistence of this configuration of countenance at once marked with the crude and grotesque features of the owl and the fine and fast lines of the falcon.

He handed Binyah a sealed package and bowed. "From the Lord Butler," he said, and turned to depart. But Binyah, possessed of the determination — sinewed with Oriental tenacity — of shielding her husband against further harm from such secret messages and messengers, courageously grasped him from the rear at the flap of his coat, flung over the right shoulder, and held him fast; not with apparent determination, for she smiled and courtesied, but with apparent pleasure at having caught a mischief maker. "Tarry with us a little," she said in most amiable manner. "I have so much to ask of you concerning this noble pair of royal tramps who are disporting themselves abroad at the expense of the king's treasury and of the yearning of their devoted wives." And she drew him irresistibly into the chamber of the goodman of the house.

"I will fetch a little wine and meat," she purred, to the utter discomfort of the agile little fellow, who allowed himself to be pressed down on a low seat and to be told to be patient. "I will be back in an instant," she assured him, with inscrutable artifice, "and meanwhile I will send you my own butler for company."

And away she was before he had had time to adjust his short legs, all swathed in his large garments, to the position which he had taken only at her urging. A

minute later a stalwart negro came sauntering in, saluted, and squatted in front of him on the floor, so close to his seat that he could not arise without falling into the black man's arms. And this negro immediately began to talk about everything not particularly interesting, after the jovial fashion of his race.

After a little while Binyah returned, and with her a dainty young maid bearing a tray full of crocks, bottles and bumpers, bread, and fried, cold fowl. At the entrance, however, there seemed to sound the stealthy, slinking tread of many feet; of those who were being posted on guard.

The guest ate and drank after a fashion, while answering freely all the nonsensical questions which Binyah was pouring out over him like a shower of scented water; for there glowed a pleasing warmth of good-fellowship in her every word. But after this initial feinting and squaring off, Binyah opened a hard-and-close tilt, in which the suspicious guest was more than once in danger of being unhorsed. She had now had time to take his measure. It was clear to her that he had not simply come to deliver a message, and that the message which he had delivered was a forgery.

All the while that she was plying and pestering him with queries as insinuating as a double-edged sword, she was looking at or over the edge of the tablet he had handed her at the door. It read: "Let my dear Binyah make ready my chariot and come to me. I have taken lodgings at the tavern of the *Neb-pehti-ra*,¹ where I shall meet her. Let her not delay. The must is sweet and generous. Greeting from Pent-Amen." The name was stamped with a blurred seal, as if the

¹ A title of the pharaohs, found before and after the Hyksos period.

letter had been folded and pressed together in haste and the wax had been flattened. The "seal of the sheiks" was missing.

Now Binyah was certain that Pent-Amen would return within another week. Why, then, should he wish her to undertake a journey of a hard and hot four-days' ride?

"Is Pent-Amen not in good health?" she inquired, reflecting on this doubt of her mind.

"He is well and hearty," the messenger responded readily; "but he desires his lady love to make the homeward journey with him in his chariot."

"But is his mount come to grief?" she prodded the oily-tongued prevaricator.

"His mount? Ah, ay," he sputtered; "his mount! You should hitch the chariot with only one horse."

"And he will hitch his mount with that other horse for the homeward journey?"

"Probably, my lady high. But I know little of the intentions of my Lord the Butler."

"As appeareth!" Binyah sighed, with a finished affectation of dejection. But she knew that Pent-Amen's mount was not used to the traces and the whiffletree and that her husband never thought of harnessing his proud and fleet-footed charger to the heavy, bronze-clad car of war and parade. Binyah further knew that Pent-Amen would avoid putting on in public the appearance of sympathy with the suspected patriotism of the League. Now, the *Neb-pehti-ra* was the headquarters of the conspirators. Hence, his lodging in that house probably was an invention.

"I am grieved at heart," she said in a low, quaking voice, "that my lord should seek quarters at the *Neb-pehti-ra*. It is the house of the anger of both Putiphar

and the king. Have you seen Pent-Amen at the *Neb-pehti-ra*?"

"Ay, lady mine! I received his message at the gate of the *Neb-pehti-ra*," the messenger answered slowly, as if he were looking around inwardly over his mind for a loophole.

"Foolish my man!" Binyah exclaimed, leaving the guest in doubt whether he should apply the compliment to himself or she wished to apply it to Pent-Amen. At any rate she raised her eyelids half-way over her deep brown, almond-shaped eyes, simulating languor, and looked long and intently into the man's disquieted face. Perspiration was trickling in streamlets over his brow and running down his nose, at the end of which it stopped to gather into large drops that splashed at regular intervals on the glazed plate from which he had taken his fried cold quail and capon.

He was an Oriental; so much Binyah gathered from his lack of table manners. And when through his confusion and anxiety his lips were parted, and the emissions from his mouth occasionally followed in close company the nasal drip into the heavy, hot false beard, Binyah asked him innocently whether he were an "*Ebri*."¹ At that name he winced and shook his head. Then she calmly produced the tablet which had been sent to her, or rather had been put into her bosom, after that banquet at the palace, and showed him the stamp of the sheiks.

"Of course," she reflected gravely, "if you are not an *Ebri*, an Arab, or a Chaldean, you know nothing of this?"

He answered with such an angry, nervous, and

¹ A Hebrew. The Hebrews, for one reason or another, as a race, had not a good name in Egypt, as is evident from the sarcasm of Gen. 39: 14, 16.

violent shake of the head that his wig was displaced and his beard fell off his face. Instantly he readjusted his beard first, and then also his large artificial poll, but not too quickly for Binyah. She had descried at his throat, as the collar clasp of his neck-chain, a golden medallion on which was set the "seal of the sheiks," the crossed bars in blue and the serpent in red enamel, and she had seen that short, broad chin that was a natural finishing touch to this face of a rogue.

"It is too uncomfortable for you to wear your insignia of office at table," Binyah adroitly tempted him. "Take them off and let my pages clean and curl them, and you will be a new man when you leave Pent-Amen's house."

"I am truly becoming a new man," he swore inwardly to himself; but, "By the heavens above," he cried aloud, "let me about my business; my journey is yet far from here." And he arose and fell into the tentacles of the brawny negro, who tendered him a most fervent embrace.

The black polypus, who held the light little man entangled between his legs and arms, had been toppled over and was now striving to regain his feet without losing his hold on his squirming captive. After repeated efforts to gain his end without losing his prize, the negro stretched himself supine on the mat of the floor, still tightly clutching his victim, and with one mighty jerk of the upper body jumped to his feet, like a fish flinging itself full length out of the water with a flirt of its tail. It was a feat of strength of which scarcely any but the supple black men of the South were capable; for they took particular delight in exercises often more of the acrobatic than of the gymnastic style.

Binyah looked on admiringly and beckoned to the negro to place the little man on a pedestal at the side of the dais in the middle of the chamber. That pedestal was standing free of the wall so as to be accessible from all sides. On it stood a bust of one of the old kings — or perhaps it was that of an old god; none knew or cared — of about two feet high, in front of which a silver pan was fastened to the abacus, probably for the incense offering made once in a while, when Pent-Amen felt himself inclined to be superstitious for the sake of old traditions, and for the encouragement of a religious spirit among his servants. The negro set the frightened guest on the shoulders of the bust with the feet in the pan, and held him down.

“Now will you be good enough to tell me what you have done with Zoroith?” Binyah addressed him with mock solemnity; “for if this our new god will not condescend to favor us with an oracle, we shall be constrained to warm his feet with the fire and open his lips with the smoke of an incense offering. You are a spy, good my man; a confederate of ‘*Raca-el*,’ the ‘Fool of God.’ Your design is to lure me away on a journey, so that I may not alarm the watchmen of Putiphar and snatch away your prey.”

The poor new false god superimposed on an old one knew not what answer to make to conciliate the favor of his artful and ardent devotee. For it was now no longer doubtful to him that this gentle woman was as deeply set in her determination to make him give forth his secrets as a spruce bulldog, in obstinate wickedness guarding the foot of a tree in the crown of which is perched its feline quarry declining closer acquaintance. He decided to impersonate the *dumb idol* for a trial. But Binyah forthwith filled the basin with incense

and called for live coals. A page appeared at her call, bearing a stone pot full of arduously spitting and licking fire.

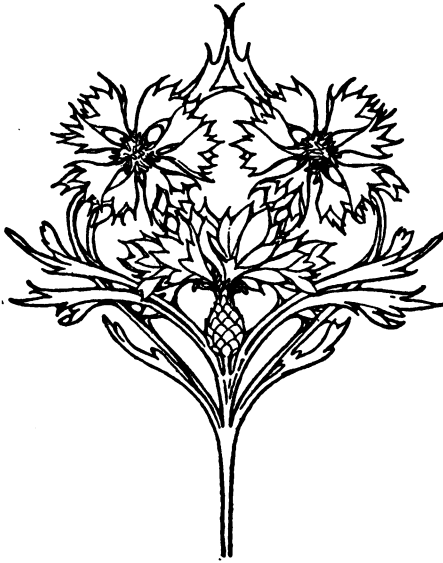
"Put them around his feet first," she directed him; and after a moment: "No," she added, "loosen his sandals; the burning leather would spoil the fragrance of the offering." The page set down the pot, produced a pair of tongs from his linen sash, and prepared deliberately to burn the victim's feet. He raised the feet out of the basin, one after the other, and stripped off the soft leather stockings, together with the sandals, and laid them aside. Then taking up the fire-pot, he lifted out a crackling coal with the tongs and held it suspended over the basin for a moment. The living idol stirred quite energetically and drew up its knees under its chin. The coal was dropped on the incense and the smoke rose in a white, curling cloud. More coals were added, until the pot was empty.

The smoke became so dense that the several actors of this dangerous play could no longer see each other. The negro who was holding the wretched captive down on the neck and shoulders of the statue was forced to sneeze violently several times in quick succession. He tottered and nodded, bowed and bellowed and roared, until he was unable to see and to stand up. He lost his hold only for an instant; but in that instant his victim disappeared.

Outside the high window they found his wig and beard half an hour later, and down the road towards the river someone picked up several links of a neck-chain, which Binyah thought were part of the little man's jewelry. But the little man himself was nowhere to be found. Also the search for Zoroith terminated at the river without other results than that she

was last seen by some boatmen to enter a bark in the company of a small man who immediately sailed away downstream.

Binyah now was more anxious than ever that Pent-Amen should shorten the period of his absence and return home. Fate was approaching her own house at a rapid pace.





Chapter Thirtieth

CHECKED, BUT NOT FOILED

PENT-AMEN and Ai-defa returned home on the appointed day with a report of experiences and significant minor incidents which fully justified the opinion of Binyah concerning Rahuel and the secret band of intriguers whom he employed as his spies and envoys. In the first place, Ai-defa was informed in the Arp-hesep that the foreign seal annexed to the official seal of the League on the document appointing him chief of the middle section of the land was not known to the leaders and, therefore, was added by the messenger himself, or by someone else who had opened, read, and resealed it in transit.

Moreover, that document was issued at Thebes, the center and head of the conspiracy, and had been entrusted to a special post-rider, who was to forward it as far as the next relay station, where it was to be given to the officers in charge for secret conveyance to the Arp-hesep central post. From that last stop it had been forwarded by an official messenger — who had not yet returned. However, since the paper was duly delivered and the official carrier of the League had vanished, it was certain that he had met with foul play under way at the hands of those who took a treasonable interest in the work of the League. All these circumstances pointed at Rahuel.

Secondly, the twain ministers of the royal board had taken special precautions to guard against the intrusion of a spy on their expedition. They had sent a trusted confederate ahead and had kept another in their rear, the one preceding and the other following them at their stopping places at a distance of one station. By this means they both cleared and covered their tracks. The guard who followed them had soon taken notice of Rahuel, who was most solicitous in questioning the attendants at the inns concerning the high-born officials who had stopped there for rest and refreshment. He approached Rahuel by degrees, exhibited marked interest in all that was said of his twain charges, and insinuated himself into the good graces of his alert traveling companion. In the Arp-hesep he clung to Rahuel like a leech, keeping him away from the dubious paths of the two leaguers and effectually shielding the whole circle of the conspirators from Rahuel's evil curiosity. He had also noticed that Rahuel despatched a messenger to Memphis, a light and short man, who had accidentally associated himself to them a day or two after their arrival in the Arp-hesep and took up quarters at the *Neb-pehti-ra*, where there was not even the scent of either Pent-Amen or Ai-defa to be found, not to think of their personal presence. But the guard remained at that ill-reputed inn and succeeded in keeping Rahuel at that place as effectually as if he had been in prison.

One evening Rahuel and his inseparable companion were sauntering down the bank of the river discussing the ever-present danger of an outbreak of lawlessness in the Arp-hesep. "But the fuse of this mine," Rahuel observed, "is strung from here all the way up to Thebes and, if I mistake not, is again strung down to Memphis.

Whenever one of the disgruntled leaders will touch fire to it, there will be an upheaval to overthrow the government up and down the land and to lay in ruins the splendid structure of order and comfort built by the foreign kings at an enormous expenditure of blood and sweat. I should think that peace and prosperity are such acceptable possessions as must be respected by every lover of his brethren."

"Not at the cost of liberty," the native responded quickly and heatedly. But he instantly subsided, and added as an excuse of his protest: "Twine a cradle with garlands; decorate it with silver and gold; cover it with royal tapestry: if it is occupied by the child of a stranger, it is an eyesore in the house."

This was in a measure a concession to Rahuel's fault-finding and protesting impudence. It sufficed to open his eyes to the true character of the man who had so obsequiously followed him. To wring it from him was what Rahuel had aimed at with all his wiles of suggestion and insinuation, but it was bitter for him to confess that he had been most egregiously duped. Yet he was pleased to know that Pent-Amen's and Ai-defa's business in the Arp-hesep was of such importance that it put them to the necessity of resorting to trickery in order to keep him in the dark. This was news big enough to elicit the interest of Putiphar. It was a victory, and he was careful not to let his companion suspect how much he enjoyed it. He turned abruptly from the unseasonable subject and forthwith lapsed into a new and less trickish course.

"The young and amiable spouse of Ai-defa is not well," he said, with a warmth that savored of rather more than friendship and instantly engaged the attention of Ai-defa's emissary. "A change of scene, a

short stay among these cheerful hills, amid these blessed groves, should much improve her health."

Rahuel had spoken with more emphasis than was his habit, and of things not open to the inspection and criticism of a stranger. His companion felt that to so gratuitous an insertion of Rahuel's interest into the most sacred relations of Ai-defa, a reply was neither due nor appropriate. He ignored the impertinence that it seemed to him, and in his turn thrust an inquisitive hand into Rahuel's feathers.

"You seem to be concerned to an unusual degree about the weal and wo of our land," he led off briskly. "You are a foreigner, not established, nor yet accepted among us. What may prompt you to put your hand in our affairs?"

He realized that he had through zeal made a false step; so he might as well be frank and let the detestable spy know that he was not afraid of him and his despicable trade. Rahuel was sorely disappointed that his trick was revealed, and was angered at the contemptuous tone of the questioner. He stopped and turned to look the young man fully in the face. "Friend," he said with a hard, hammering accent, "I have interests to promote and to guard of which you shall hear in their time, which will not be a season of pleasure for you and your confederates. Ai-defa's wife is my ward; she owes her life to me — and not to Ai-defa. Tell your master this! It will give him the key to some interesting revelations." Then he separated himself from the young man and returned alone to the inn. The same evening he disappeared.

Pent-Amen and his colleague were duly informed of the interview. The unexpected disclosure that Zoroith was Rahuel's ward was received with amazement.

This relation between the upstart Hebrew and the daughter of the Arab sheik was ample ground for the most wicked suspicions to thrive. Then Zoroith had been the link between the conspirators and their implacable foe? He had found no other source to tap for information concerning the League? Now they would give him short shrift for his reward. Zoroith, a young Arab woman, would count for nothing in a cause outside the Gate.¹

But did they suspect that Rahuel had perhaps diverted their attention from his secret connection with the headspring of the conspiracy by placing openly before them an easy prey? At their return to Memphis they learned of the mysterious disappearance of the suspected woman. "Had you only not held my arms," Ai-defa raved to Pent-Amen, "when I wanted to dash her to pieces!"

Ai-defa made no immediate effort to recover his disaffected spouse, but resolved to employ her disappearance as a whip with which to drive also her seducer from the city. After a few days he had a conference with the chancellor, to whom he complained in bitterest terms of the archintriguer Rahuel and his confederate, the "man of light and short figure," whom Binyah had undertaken to roast alive, and of his faithless spouse, "who has absconded," he wailed, "at the behest of that consummate hypocrite in the garb of pedagogue."

But Rahuel himself had previously had a private interview with Putiphar, in which he had aired all his suspicions concerning the dealings of the stewards of the king in the Arp-hesep, told of their watching and checking him, of the secrecy of their stay, of the spy they had set upon him. Then he had paid his compli-

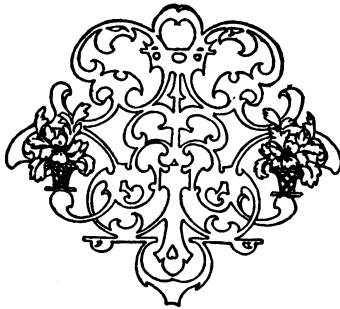
¹ "In a court of law."

ments in private also to Nefer-hotep, and had stuffed her ears with such a tale of scandal as she had never hoped to hear in a lifetime. Zoroith had absconded with a goldsmith from Thebes, he had whispered; her life at the side of the "unsteady" Ai-defa had been a continued bondage and torment on account of the undisguised admiration of the chief baker for the artful Binyah. Would the gracious lady speak a word of her gentle power in his favor to the mighty "Right Leg"? He was afraid of the persecution of the two mighty ministers of the pharaoh, who might secretly make away with him. They had power to employ the police of the royal palace in their private service; could she not procure a seal for him, which would range him in the inviolable rank of the pharaoh's officials and render him secure from the jealousies of his adversaries?

Putiphar had been duly interpellated by his obliging spouse and had been persuaded to keep Rahuel "within the protection of his shadow"; but the request for bestowing a seal on the foreigner he had felt himself obliged to deny. "It is meddling with the king's business," he had deferentially informed Nefer-hotep. "Let the twain ministers of the board arrest Rahuel; they have a good deal of despite to square against him, but can do him no harm without my consent. It will soothe their wrath and make them more pleasant company at the Court if they can worry him a little, and it will not hurt him, foreigner that he is, to be gradually initiated in the customs of the Double High House. He is not yet ripe for public service among the cultured of the land. I should not take it much amiss if they drove him away for a little while."

In matters of his office Putiphar was impervious to all influences, deaf to all pleadings, and heedless even

of the tears of his wife. His declaration of Rahuel's unfitness for public honors and public office was as final as a decision by law. Nefer-hotep might glower and pout, but he would pacify her by a fatherly tap on the shoulder and a bit of tyrannical advice to look as closely after her own household as he was looking after that of the king, and to be as watchful over her own servants as he was watchful over those of the king. For Nefer-hotep was a young and sprightly woman, much younger than the stately "Right Leg" of the pharaoh, and a little given to dissipation and to the shirking of the matronly obligations of a solid housewife. So Rahuel was in good part left to the tender mercies of the two stewards, especially to those of the irate Ai-defa, who was determined to rid himself of the impudent intruder upon his business.





Chapter Thirty-first

DRIVEN OUT

AFTER his interview with Putiphar and Nefer-hotep, Rahuel returned to his post in the house of Ptah-hetep, where he was certain of comparative shelter and security. He was agreed with himself that he would not disquiet the students and, least of all, his favorite pupil by reciting to them his experiences of the last few weeks. He would mix for a while longer with the disciples of the venerable Nutri-Hon¹ mainly for the purpose of withdrawing his person from public view and of disarming the widespread suspicion of his connection with the domestic troubles of both the butler and the baker of the palace. Thus he approached the cozy lodge of his client with an air of peace purposely designed to dispel any accidental misgivings that might have been gathered during his absence. His brow was high and clear, his eye as sober and serene as the moon, and his sharp lips were softened with a slight smile of mingled pleasure at the anticipated happy meeting, and of fleetly vexation at the tardy progress of his labor of revenge. But he had no sooner drawn aside the curtain at Ptah-hetep's private chamber than his feet were arrested at the sight of one of his former comrades — Samma.

¹ "Divine Prophet"; a title of the chief priests in ancient Egypt.

It was Samma, the giant, without doubt. The same who had broken the ropes on the occasion of Rahuel's flight with his discontented brethren. And here he sat broadly at the table, drinking wine from a huge pot, eating the sweet wheaten bread that was the pride of the Egyptian housewife, tearing into ribbons with his teeth and swallowing like a cannibal a robust roasted wild cock, that looked solid enough even on the platter to suggest its erstwhile pugnacity and an informal remonstrance against its present unchivalrous exit. And Samma was alone! And what a sight was Samma! His head was shaved almost to a polish, but his beard, also lately subjected to the reformatory operations of the razor, was again quietly sprouting, lending his broad and loose face the aspect of the grinning mask of a wild boar.

Samma was of a peace-loving disposition. The only object in the wide world to trouble him was his stomach. If that was at ease, let the world perish. A companion at a generous feast blowing in on him was just what he had desired. He glanced at the newcomer, arose, grasped the pot at both ears, and presented it with an effort at dignified condescension. "Brother, drink!" he coaxed the astonished stranger. He did not recognize his countryman in his distinctively Egyptian garb and refined and distant bearing. "A drop worth while praying for," he continued, approaching Rahuel with the uplifted heavy pot; "from the temple vineyards of Thebes, the student maintains. He is celebrating his birthday, somewhere up the river, where he sailed this morning with a number of his friends, to hunt crocodiles, he said to me; if it is not girls."

Rahuel pushed the voluble guzzler ahead of him into the middle of the chamber and sat down at the table.

His features had not changed, except for a slight parting of the lips, due, no doubt, to his growing curiosity about his client: whether he had persevered in his good resolution of eschewing the wooing of the cheering cup. He felt much inclined to pursue this conjecture on the hand of the observations he was making in Samma's conduct and narrative. But Samma would not suffer a pause now that he had found an attentive and appreciative listener.

"Fine boy," he continued; "fine boy, this P'-per-pa-ta-ah-he — *hm?* Forgotten — as usual!" And once more he began: "Pi-pu-pa-he-top!" he cried, the last syllable at the top of his voice, and concluded by spitting vehemently from horror and abomination of the name. "Drink, man!" he bellowed at Rahuel, "lest the wine sour in the pot." And again he held the vessel up to Rahuel's lips.

Rahuel hesitated. Should he reveal his identity to the uncouth tribesman? If he drank he had revealed himself as a foreigner; if he did not drink he had insulted a countryman, a former friend and confederate, who would never forget the insult, if he ever learnt that it was a tribesman of his who had refused his offer of a friendly sip. Hence he affected an air of graciousness, grasped the pot at the ears, and took a hearty draught. The wine was exquisite, and Rahuel drank once more ere he set down the huge crock on the table.

"And now, brother," Samma said affectionately, "say something, that I may know that you are not deaf and dumb, and that you have perhaps not heard a word of what I have labored hard to say. Who are you, man?"

"I am the guardian of this Pi-pu-pa-he-top," Rahuel replied mockingly.

"I thought from the start that you could not pronounce the name," Samma laughed. "I have bitten my tongue over it so that my speech has been a little impaired. Well now; you are the guardian of this unspeakable Egyptian hopeful? Then let him live in glory. For, may your honor know that I also am his guardian. He commanded me to clear away all this wine before he returns from his jaunt. He is afraid of the temptation, I think; he drinks with the storks." And Samma dipped the pot, and kneeling down before it, drank as long as he could hold his breath, which was until the crock was drained to the bottom.

"Poor fellow," Rahuel hummed to himself, "you have not learnt the lesson of the *Ruach Musri*"; but said aloud: "How are you come among the scholars? Are you striving to fit yourself for the priesthood of Ra?"

"Nay, brother dear," Samma returned bluntly; "the great Ra is blest with more priests than is an honor to his reputation. He should have more worshippers who made it their daily task to thank him that he makes so precious a wine to grow in this watery land. If our Ra at home in Chanaan blesses us with a rich and generous vintage, we make haste to kill a ram for sacrifice right on the spot of the blessing; but you content yourselves with tickling the nose of *your* Ra with a whiff of smoke from a censer."

"Then you consider the Ra of Chanaan as distinct from the Ra of Egypt?"

"Oh no! It is the same sun that shines everywhere."

"But is it also the same God?" Rahuel pressed him, anxious about the orthodoxy of his liberal-minded countryman, though he himself professed little religion.

But Samma answered with great ease and leisure: "Hear, O you man of the wisdom of Mizraim! You peer up at the stars and lay out their course on paper, and figure the condition of weather and wind from your observations; all the stars which you can observe gyrate about *your* Ra. But now *your* Ra also does his own turns; for he comes out of the gate of heaven in the east and goes to rest in the western gate. Who, now, is it that turns your Ra or helps him turning himself? He is nothing but a fiery orb, like the rest of the stars which blink down knowingly at night as if they said: 'The old man is gone home; now for a merry time.' You are one of the learned scribes who know that the true Ra dwells high above the dome of heaven. Your people pray to the sun; but you pray to the Master of the universe—who is the same God as the *Elohim* of my fathers."

This profession of faith was orthodox, and Rahuel was pleased. "You are not an Egyptian?" he inquired again, to test the soberness of his tribesman.

"Nay, brother; little as you may like it! But I thank God I am a Hebrew!"

"Why should you thank your God who made you spring from a lowly race and placed you in a country where you are strangers, surrounded by enemies, condemned to the solitude of the field and the pasture? You have neither cities nor temples, nor princes and kings, and lack all the refinement, and even the ordinary comforts of life."

"Ah me, my good scribe," Samma gasped; "learned though you be, do you so highly value wealth and comfort? Our hostile neighbors are valiant shepherds like ourselves; our comfort is our contentment, our cities are our tents, and our pleasure is labor and the

chase. How have you leisure for play? But — know you that we have no slaves! Every man among us is a king!”

“Your irreverence towards the institutions of this country will surely create trouble for you.”

“Indeed, brother, it is only a few days ago that I was beaten unmercifully for my thoughtlessness. I should have held my peace, but I joined in an argument with two natives who were almost come to blows over a discussion.”

“What was the difficulty?”

“The one said: ‘The face of the Neb¹ is turned towards the east, because thence enters Ra’; and the other objected: ‘Nay, but because thence came the new rulers.’² And neither would yield. Therefore, when they had talked themselves angry and were ready for a tiff with the fists, I sprang to their assistance, asking the first: ‘If it is an honor to Ra to show him the face in the morning, why does the Neb not turn around in the evening?’ And teaching the other: ‘The Neb had his face turned eastward long before the Asiatic kings descended upon the land.’ Then I told the twain together: ‘The Neb is on the lookout towards the east for the great Deliverer of the Nations who shall come out of the heights of the heavens with a glory like to the rising sun.’ Did I not answer rightly?”

“How do you know these things?”

“You know them as well as I; they all know them. All nations look forward to the Deliverer. But if I answered rightly, why did they cuff and cudgel me like an unreasoning ass?”

¹ Neb: “The Great Lord”; the sphinx at Kairo.

² The Hyksos.

"Because you are a stranger in the land."

"Yea, brother; so they said. I should first scratch my own pelt, they said; and yet they did the scratching for me, even unto scouring. I was so scraped and bruised that I have had all my hair removed in order to be able to apply salves and plasters directly to the broken skin. But now I have repeated the same irreverence before you, and you have not punished me."

"I am not an Egyptian."

"What!" exclaimed Samma, springing into the air, and for a moment intently surveying the herculean figure of his affable guest. "Are you — brother! Are you my own old stupid madcap Rahuel! I took you for a polished Arab on account of your mincing accent, or for a cowherd or a husbandman, but not an instant for our vehement, rude, and hot-headed Rahuel, although you are a cowherd by birth, by right of brotherhood also an Arab, and by dint of self-will on the way of becoming an Egyptian husbandman."

All this was delivered in one fast stream of exclamation without break or pause, at the end of which Samma clasped his new-found friend so tightly in his arms that he nearly smothered him. Rahuel roared and struggled. "Wretch," he shouted at last, tearing himself away, "have you no sense, you jack of the wheel!"¹

But Samma reminiscently intercepted the coming lecture. "Vexatious work, brother, at the wheel," he drawled. "I hung at the wheel one time for two long moons like a spider under the eaves on a misty morning, jumping up and down, hither and thither, amid prayer and profanity, weeping and laughing and gasping and sweating, until my ears lay languid on my shoulders.

¹ The lowest slave who turned the wheel at the dikes; an insult.

Rahuel, brother! The ox on the threshing floor and the ass in the treadmill are doing child's play compared to the labor at the scoop-wheels of the dikes. Oh, for another pot of wine to celebrate with fitting solemnity the event of finding a brother again in this strange and lonely land!"

But it was unprofitable wishing and sighing. There was no more wine in the house. And it was no harm for the fervent lover of the bumper. He was beginning to show signs of waning fortitude. He swayed, held himself at the edge of the table, and ceremoniously put himself together on the floor in a sitting posture. Rahuel watched him with disgust, and as several ominous yawns and gasps pointed to an impending catastrophe, he took up a rug from the floor, toppled Samma over on his back, and covered him. "Such are ruinous joys," he commented on the disgraceful condition of his intemperate tribesman.

Ptah-hetep was long returning. It was at the time of the dawn of day that at last he slunk into the house. Rahuel's first look was inquisitive of his pupil's condition. But the youth was sober, to the immense satisfaction of his tutor and monitor.

"Thanks be to God," he said heartily as he opened his arms for a fatherly embrace of the manly boy; "you are in full possession of your faculties. Here lies your wine pot, buried under a mat. What will you do with the glutton?"

"What shall I do with *you*? This is the first concern of mine," Ptah-hetep answered, with visible anxiety.

Rahuel stepped back. His face was covered with sudden confusion. "What has happened?" he snapped.

"The king's butler is making a search after you."

"Is this the whole message of sorrow?"

"At the command of Putiphar."

"Go ahead, my son. I am not afraid."

"I was stopped on the way and examined; but as I was unaware of your return, I told them truthfully that I had not seen you in several weeks, and that you were not at my house. If now they find you here, I shall be made to share your fate."

"Will you drive me forth into the arms of the bailiffs?"

"I will not; but —"

"What will you do?"

"If I only knew!"

"But if they come here?"

"You are wiser and shrewder than I."

"Can I find a hiding place in this house?"

"No; this house is as open as my hand. Has Samma seen and recognized you?"

"Yes, Samma knows who I am. Are the authorities aware of his presence here?"

"Hardly. He has been with me only a few days. He came to me, he avers, because he had heard that I harbored a Hebrew."

"How have you learnt that I am a Hebrew?"

"Your language betrays you."

"Does Putiphar know me for a Hebrew?"

"Putiphar knows every man in the city. He had known you even before you were apprehended in the last raid on our tavern."

"But he lately sent me on a mission which he would entrust to no foreigner."

"Putiphar would rather give his confidence to a foreigner who is far removed from the jealousies of the courtiers than to a native. In his own house he has set a young Hebrew slave over all his servants. The

foreigners keep a secret more closely than the native officials, who are banded together in coteries and cliques that are interested in each other with the interest of jealousy."

"What is the charge laid against me?"

"You yourself must know best. The people chat about various crimes of which they hold you guilty. But it is all invention, I believe, or exaggeration."

"What, definitely, for example?"

"They say that you have spirited away the wife of Ai-defa, and have had designs on Binyah also, and have striven to kill the twain stewards." Rahuel could not suppress a light, quiet laugh at the multitude and variety of his reputed wickedness. Yet he knew that the charges were quite true.

"It is bad, forsooth, my son Ptah-hetep," he snickered, amused at the vision of a plentiful harvest from so lavish a sowing. "I think I know that such offenses are visited with capital punishment?"

"Not always. But adultery will cost you one thousand blows of the rod, if you can prove that the woman consented; and then the woman will lose her nose."

"Then I am constrained to save the uppish little nose of my lady the butler's wife. A trim young woman could not show her face without a nose."

"Would you take to flight? The morning is fast awakening, the full day is near. Go your way before they cast you in bonds; the king's prison is dark and deep!"

"Flee now? Let the people wake up and fill the streets and I shall walk among them and disappear somewhere. Whoever may now be seen walking the streets alone will surely be stopped. Have you a wig

and beard to lend me? Mine are too well known to some of the bailiffs."

"I can furnish you with a wig to grace the head of a bridegroom."

"Can you also procure three or four attendants? I will pay them well."

Ptah-hetep had meanwhile produced a wig and beard of brown, silky hair, which Rahuel put on with much care and dainty handling. He was surely not to be suspected of vanity, as no man is; but he was nevertheless as much pleased as a girl at his own handsome reflexion from the polished metal mirror before which he was preening and perking. Perhaps his pleasure was due solely to his triumphant anticipation of the disappointment he was preparing for his enemies.

Ptah-hetep had gone out on the street and was now returning with four men, who were bearing a gaily decorated litter. "They have just borne a merchant to the dock, where a boat is ready for sailing," he said joyfully.

"Whither?" demanded Rahuel.

"Towards Anu."¹

"It is well. Lend me a mantle. I shall send it back from the river."

Ptah-hetep was overjoyed to see his master maintain so cool a disposition and be so sure of an opportunity of saving himself. He selected from his ample wardrobe a garment of youthful and elegant appearance and threw it over Rahuel's shoulders. It sat snug about the neck and rolled down to his knees in rich and graceful folds. Rahuel made a dignified sweep with the left arm from under the soft, rustling linen and gathered up the ends of the coat, holding them

¹ Heliopolis.

together with easy grace over the breast. Then he bent towards Ptah-hetep's ear and "Goodbye!" he whispered, "until I return with the *butler's mantle on my shoulders*." And with solemn tread he walked out into the daylight and boarded the stately conveyance.

The porters officiously engaged to draw the curtains, but he forbade them, saying: "Not yet, not yet. This soft morning light is balm for my weary limbs," and gave the signal for departure. On the way a dozen or more idlers joined themselves to the porters with a view to relieving them, or ran around the litter softly purring flatteries at the venerable occupant, also with a view of relieving the porters, of course, and, incidentally, of catching a small extra perquisite for their good-will.

The trip to the dock was made without unpleasant incident. Once they were hailed by a band of Ai-defa's bailiffs, but not stopped for the reverence of the majestic figure seated grave and upright, with the weight of many learned scrolls inclining his head slightly forward, in the comfortable carriage. They must have mistaken him for an official of the palace, for they respectfully inquired whether that Hebrew villain had not yet been caught. They had overhauled every bark, they said, but without result; they would be forced to search the house of Ptah-hetep, despite the young man's protestations of his ignorance of the whereabouts of the knave.

"Search right diligently, my good men," Rahuel encouraged them, carefully selecting and pronouncing his words in order to conceal his lack of native polish of speech behind a condescending affectation. "My best wishes for your good luck! That villain has an eye also on Putiphar; report this to His Lordship the

Chancellor, with my compliments." The "hands of the law" hesitated a moment in withdrawing from the affable official and followed him with disappointed and inquiring looks. Had he forgotten something? Rahuel asked himself. Ah, yes! "My name?" he cried back, raising a hand in apology. "*Mer-kau-n-P'hotepra*,"¹ he trilled with gladsome intonation.

At the full glory of the day, when the face of the sun was reflected in a thousand splendors in the rippling waters of the Nile, the ship's master lighted the incense offering and had the vessel cut from her moorings. And as the light boat sailed out upon the current of the river, Rahuel was standing at the stern stealthily flirting the skirt of his mantle before his face to keep the idolatrous smoke of the sacrifice to the sun from his orthodox nose.

¹ "The Keeper of the *cattle* of Putiphar" (quite an unkind estimate of his pursuers).





Chapter Thirty-second

IN DISTRESS

THE vessel on which Rahuel took passage for Anu was a lightly built but rather large barge, as flat on deck as a turtle on the bottom and of as shallow a mold on the bottom as a turtle on top. It moved with staid dignity, because its entire broad bottom at once pressed on the water and, for the same reason, yielded its whole power of carriage to the rapid current in the middle of the river, which lent its gait the energy and force of a larger sharp-keeled boat. It was a pleasure boat. On deck were erected several large square tents or booths, grouped on both sides of the main mast, fore and aft, from which Rahuel heard the incessant whispering, merry giggling, and light, contained laughter of women's and girls' voices. "They are early about their business," he grunted. But of what nature he considered that business of theirs to be he kept to himself, for the reason of its being so obvious.

The voyage down the stream in the early morning was a delightful experience to the sober fugitive. He could not long resist the charm of the beautiful and ever-varying scene of the landscape flitting by at arm's length from the stream. The green fields, the flowery banks, the blossom-laden gardens and parks, the peaceful, busy towns and villages reproduced in his memory

and fancy the lovely pictures of paradise, lying latent, buried, in his heart since the days of his childhood, when they were first graven therein by the eloquent narrators of the legends of old in Chanaan. But with all its richness it was only a narrow strip on both sides of the river that formed the interesting, fascinating picture. It was framed with a border of dead sand, and on either side in the far back loomed the dark crests of rugged mountain ranges. The country was only a narrow channel of fertility and beauty, forced to wage war unceasingly against the hostile desert, and depending for its every phase of existence and prosperity on a single source, the Nile.

Was the mingled childish and mystical trend of every exterior manifestation of life in Egypt also a reflection and product of these physical conditions? Were these huge structures of pyramids and temples, in contrast with the petty forms of public worship, not an exact counterpart of the Egyptian conception of the Divine, as this conception was the mirrored pulse and breath of the landscape? A cloudlet of incense offered for sacrifice in the colossal halls; a single casket with the mummy of one king stored in the bosom of a gigantic mausoleum; a cat or some other domestic beast placed side by side with the immense Ra for veneration—were they not a petty exhibition of mighty designs and impulses? The active, analytical mind of the Hebrew had soon discovered and discerned the incongruities of Egyptian life and sentiment. Rahuel could not but make comparisons suggested with such persistence and force as the wide and silent desert, the dark distant range, the towering pyramid squat amid the neat green, and the massive temple flat against the vacant sky were bound to exert on the eye and the mind of the

sensitive spectator of this unharmonious panorama. There was a display of manifest disharmony between the double strip of green fringing a mighty river and the white and dead expanse of sand lying with the stillness of lurking death on either border of the teeming but frail vein of life; between the flat ground and the soaring obelisks and temples, the empty horizon and these magnificent piles; between the mighty work and the petty spirit of these people.

These things were evidence of a disunion of head and hand. But the natural condition of the country could not alone be at fault for such far-reaching contrasts between the work and the will of man. It was impossible to conceive that the same high spirit should have planned the structure of the temple that now disgraced its purpose by a mean form of worship and a jumbling together of God and creatures in the same noble shrine. Either all the present greatness of Egypt was created by a mighty race of men now gone and forgotten, and inherited by an impotent race of stupid admirers and imitators, or it was created by the ancestors of the same race of men gifted with a higher and purer genius.

But where was the source of their inspiration; who was the giver of the divine spark of that enthusiasm which reared these gorgeous temples for the honor of an unseen God? For it was not Ra, the sun, who was to be adored within walls of stone, when his open splendor in the clear heavens solicited a much more reasonable worship. Was this exterior similarity of relation between the character of the country and that of its inhabitants, between physical activity and mental indolence, in truth nothing but the reflection and mirage of a secret vital process by which the order of life was turned topsy-turvy and the activity of the mind was

paralyzed? For there was not found in the national life of Egypt the trace of a single great thought and purpose so manifest in the advance of the other contemporaneous nations. Their architecture was a monument of human genius and ambition of the noblest sort; but it was ranged along the march of an ancient race, now barely known from its embalmed remains in the tombs. Their sphinxes peered forward into the future; their gilt-topped obelisks pointed towards heaven; their majestic temples bore witness to an ardent zeal of religion. Their laws were just, their moral code wise, their institutions practical; their country was wealthy, their children cheerful, their priests learned, their kings mild. And yet death wore the ghastly mask of despair, heaven was a sealed book, and religion consisted in the joy of the feast-days and the adornment of the temples. And yet the lot of the weak was hard, their joys were shallow, the administration oppressive and dishonest. Law had no support, as it had no origin, save in the will of the sovereign; religion had no authority save that of a jealous and haughty priesthood; morality had no sanction save that of the rod and the ax, and the order of public life depended on the whim of the mighty. Egypt had lost sight of the eternal truth, that man is not made for the empire of the earth alone.

The sphinxes had been built by the sturdy generations of their fathers at a period when the heritage of the original races, the faith in one true God and the duty of His adoration in word and deed, and the blissful hope in the advent of a heavenly Deliverer, anointed the eyes of the sphinx with the joy of hope, and the point of the obelisk with the vigor of courage, and the temple with the awe and reverence of the infinite and

immutable. The succeeding generations had imitated and copied; but of masterpieces to compare with the ancient patterns, they had wrought none. The stamp of the immaterial and divine, of the ever-living and yet unchanging, was worn away from the seal of human genius. One kind of immutability had survived: that of the stark rigor of death.

With such thoughts Rahuel busied himself on the monotonous journey, looking forward with keen anticipation to his arrival in Anu, the city of mystery. There was to be found the most ancient temple on Egyptian soil. It had been built by the first Cushite settlers of the Nile valley and had been dedicated to Shem, the first false god introduced from Asia. The Hyksos kings had displaced both the god and his cult and had given the temple over to the worship of the true God as it was at the time practised by the caste of the warriors, who had preserved a large proportion of the ancient universal traditions. Superstition was indeed not wholly excluded from this form of worship, but it was not so repulsive, immoral, and crude as that in vogue among the native priesthood, who had, in spite of the enduring orthodoxy of the castes of the warriors and of the scribes, soon descended to practises and tenets of their own invention, the result of a mistaken reverence for the varicolored idolatry of neighboring and kindred nations.

Amid his ramblings Rahuel suddenly experienced the sting of regret; he should have inquired of Samma after the fate and the whereabouts of Phares and the others of his brethren. But Samma had conceived such a rosy view of the world from the fumes of the wine that his accuracy of memory and statement was open to doubt, and Rahuel had felt reluctant to invite a

closer friendship from the inveterate and disgusting toper. If he could find Phares he might also incidentally obtain some welcome news concerning the fate of Aseneth, of whom he had no more bethought himself since that occasion of their imminent shipwreck in the rapids of the reefs in the Red Sea. He nearly was inclined to chide himself for his neglect of the memory of her. There was a mystery about the girl's deportation from her home, as well as about her destination among the heathen priests of Anu. Of course it mattered little to him what lot Jacob had in view for the child; that was Jacob's business. But whether Aseneth had remained faithful to the patriarchal traditions, or had been won over to the idolatry of Egypt, that mattered a little also to Rahuel, as it would matter to anyone of her countrymen, inasmuch as every tribesman of Jacob was in conscience bound to watch over the purity of the faith of the whole mixed family. But Rahuel was not in the habit of building up a scheme on any but sure foundations. Time would tell the story of Aseneth.

In the evening a stop was made at the docks of a dark and quiet city, so dark and quiet in fact that it seemed rather a cemetery than a station of human activity. "They have all gone down to Anu," the ship's master explained, reading the curiosity of his guests in their faces.

"Why have they all gone down?" Rahuel was on the point of asking, but repressed the inquiry, seeing that it might betray him as a stranger. But he wondered, nevertheless, why a whole city of busy people should desert their occupations and despise their comfort for the sake of a swim to the old heathen town. The ship's master filled his larder from the stores of

the dock, allowed his guests to go on land for an hour for the purpose of exercising their numbed limbs, and blew the horn for departure long before midnight. Rahuel had remained on board, idling away his time with watching his fellow-passengers. They were all women and maidens without exception. The merchant who had been borne to the wharf in the same litter that had accommodated him must have taken passage on another boat, or, perhaps, was only a fanciful creation of the porters. What was it that lured so many women to Anu on this day?

During the progress of the journey, both during the night and during the better part of the next day, until the moment that they entered the canal leading to the city, they passed many more hamlets and towns as silent and dark as the first. That whole region must have flocked to Anu. Perhaps it was the celebration of a special local feast-day that attracted the light-hearted masses. Well, if a special attraction was to be exhibited, Rahuel was not unwilling to be attracted, as fishing was easiest in thoughtless crowding.

The fascinating surroundings of Anu did not pass before Rahuel's sight without awakening his human love of the grand and chaste. The sea of the white and the purple flowers of the lotus at the edge of the channel, spread amid isles of waving and nodding bul-rushes and papyrus bushes, the golden fields of wheat and the blue fields of flax in the distance, shimmering like a web of gossamer over a vernal garden, and the long double and triple lines of majestic palm trees following the course of the water, cast a charm of rest and peace over Rahuel's restless mind. And when they landed at the foot of the main avenue at the head of which, far off, stood the mystic ancient house of the

drear old god from the cold highlands of Mesopotamia, Rahuel was not far from allowing a sentiment of elevation to insinuate itself into his breast. But the long double row of sphinxes which were lined along the whole extent of the avenue was offensive to his austere sense of religious propriety and threw him back into his more natural mood of vigilant reserve.

When the ship began to discharge its passengers, Rahuel at first made no move to leave ahead of its gay freight of chattering and laughing women and girls. They were evidently the wives and daughters of many of the wealthiest and most prominent officials of Memphis, and one or the other might recognize him from his fraternizing with the students, who enjoyed the privilege of an open door in every house where a marriageable daughter was receiving suitors. They were all tastefully and richly garbed and adorned, wearing diaphanous byssus veils, which covered head and shoulders; the common tunic, which reached down half-way between the knees and the ankles and was full and airy; the cape, which was so ample that it was drawn up at the shoulders, the opening thus produced on either side serving as an armhole without reducing the fulness of the garment, which enveloped its wearer as with a cloud of the finest of varicolored linen. The face, the arms, the throat, and the ankles were not covered. The veil was held in place by a band of silvery cloth encircling the head, which in turn was studded with stick-pins ornamented with precious stones of artistic fashioning and of tastily selected colors. Their feet were encased in sandals of white kid leather daintily sutured with stitches of alternating yellow and red threads and ornamented with yellow and red beads both along the seams and on the strap

over the instep. Their waists were girt with bands of soft wool of the color that best matched the shade of the borders of their garments and of the circlets about their heads.

Rahuel evinced little interest in the appearance and decoration of the domestic representatives of the gentler sex. They could in no way compare with their well-favored sisters of the cheery eastern lands, and least with those exquisite specimens of female beauty who had crossed his own path without arousing more than a momentary admiration: the delicate Zoroith — and Rahuel stopped with a gasp at the reminiscence of Zoroith's lot — and her elfish sisters, the ethereal Binyah, and the angelic Aseneth.

Again he winced at the remembrance of that strange child who had fallen in their midst as from the downy, rosy clouds of the dawn, without anyone asking her parentage or the reason for her being so dainty, so tender, and so beautiful. On looking her in the face one would understand that if her origin were not from the sky, it was from pure blood, and that a delicate little thing like herself had a born right to be as fair and good as she pleased without let or hindrance from any mortal man.

But the dainty folk of his company aboard were so slow in disembarking that he lost patience and pressed forward, gently and carefully at first, having a tender regard for the lightly shod feet and the bare arms of the lively swarm who were bent upon finishing their tales ere they stepped on land, stopping now in the path of others and blocking the narrow bridge, and then again moving forward two steps, only to make a new pause, or wedging their way back to the booths to search for a lost fan, bracelet, ear-ring, or what not.

They were not a bit annoyed at the appearance of so remarkably dignified and portly a man in their midst; they seemed reluctant to let him escape from them. Ere he knew it they had surrounded him, and the circle around him grew denser and more friendly at his every move forward. At last he was so hemmed in that he was unable to take a step at his own good pleasure, but rather was carried forward at the good pleasure of the mischievously laughing damsels, to the horror of their anxious mothers. The heavy odor of ointments, rubbed into their hair and poured out over their bodies, and mingled with perspiration, annoyed him. He could smell blood without being annoyed; but the smell of the pungent perfumes steaming with the heat of human blood was a positive discomfort to the man of the field and the forest. Yet he did not wish to be rude. He tapped one of the girls in front of him on the shoulder, gently, delicately, tentatively. She turned her head and flashed her witching black eyes at him, but did not step aside. She could not step aside without jostling those near her so long as the girls kept up their rapid fire of comments and exclamations, of half-finished questions and curtailed answers concerning the great things that awaited them in the mystic city.

Of all the cackling and clucking resounding about him Rahuel understood little, partly because he had his hands full in curbing his rising wrath, partly also because this fast-winded young brood maltreated their speech most shamefully. They may have understood what was said, but for one not born to their idiom it was impossible to reconstruct an intelligible sentence from the mutilated, dismembered, cropped, and topped sounds of their gasps, gulps, and giggles. There was

only one word which recurred incessantly in halves: "Neht," "Ahsn," "Ahst," and the unwonted "Ah'n'th" with its foreign *th*, on which the merry damsels exercised their tongues by pertly drawing up the upper lip and displaying the tip of their pointed tongues between their pearly teeth, not omitting to perk with their roguish faces towards the anguished Rahuel. It could be no name but that of Aseneth. And for her sake Rahuel gathered up his patience once more and applied only a gentle stub with the thumb of the left hand to the side of another of the girls, who was tripping dangerously near his left arm. She looked up, smiled, and patted him on the chest, merely because she was too small to pat him on the cheek. He stopped, or, rather, tried to stop, stepping back on the tender toes of one or two close behind, and was again borne forward. The lass at his left took his arm.

"Oh, why must I be the only wretch to travel with a boatload of unchained female impertinence!" he exclaimed in his own language, and with a roar that sent cold shivers through these many hotly palpitating bosoms. His patience was exhausted and his ire rose like a column of fire, branching out and breaking at the top and showering the impertinent mass about him with its myriad sparks. He dislodged the maid at his arm with a violent jerk, throwing her upon her neighbors, and causing them to set up a concert of protest, instantly swelled by their screaming mothers, which made his hair stand on end. He looked much like a nonplussed he-goat among a pack of vociferously barking and snapping puppies, so patent were his resentment and distress. But he improved the confusion by making a dexterous dash in the direction of the injured damsel, who flew from him and pushed her

sisters back out of his way, and once again he was a free man.

He did not ascend the wide avenue towards the temple, but held north towards the parks. He would have to trust to his own good fortune to obtain an uncontested footing in Anu after his encounter with the irascible daughters of the Hyksos nobles. The city was swarming with excited, hilarious visitors; a word from the fastidious damsels would bring down upon his innocent head the wrath of a score of complacent bailiffs. This night he would lurk about in the public park and take his sleep as best he might in the shadow of an arbor. By tomorrow he would be cool enough to decide upon his future course.





Chapter Thirty-third

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS



AI-DEFA'S anger was not appeased by the decamping of the scamp to whose trickery he attributed the disappearance of his wife. The entire section of the police machinery under the direct control of the royal stewards of the board had been set in motion for a general search after Zoroith. But not a trace or scent of her could be found. "She may have wandered away in one of her deep moods," some suggested, "and may have buried herself in the river"; but "She is not yet through with Ai-defa," Pent-Amen had thoughtfully mused, recalling the scene of Ai-defa's exhibition of savagery towards her, and Binyah's information that she was taken away by a short and slight man.

Zoroith's fate would not have weighed on Ai-defa as a wholly insupportable burden, after he had convinced himself of her complete estrangement from him, had he not been equally certain that she had fallen into the hands of Rahuel and his band of secret spies and agitators. To know that she should either voluntarily have surrendered herself to them, or be held captive by them against her will, was equally galling to the man who had so severe a reckoning to make with that implacable foe of his and of Pent-Amen, Rahuel. If he could only find a reason for this relent-

less persecution. If that sworn antagonist would only cast off his mask to engage in an open, hand-to-hand contest. But this secret hounding by means of unsigned, ambiguous messages, by means of dogging their every step and setting others on their tracks who did not even know that they were doing the stewards harm by reporting their innocent diversions to the traitor!

One good effect, however, was accomplished by the close approach of the treacherous hand of Rahuel to the throats of the royal stewards: they discontinued for a time their communications with the Arp-hesep and were so attentive and zealous in their official service of the pharaoh that every vestige of suspicion of their fidelity was wiped from the mind of the disquieted Putiphar. It had been a source of much annoyance and unrest to him to see his faith in the twain young and promising officers shaken for a little while; but now, although he did not doubt that they had in the past kept bad company, he rejoiced over their renunciation of sympathy with the League and hastened to forget the unpleasant incidents of the last few weeks.

The bailiffs who had been sent out to arrest Rahuel, had unearthed Samma in the house of Ptah-hetep, and thinking that he must be a foreigner because his appearance and condition were disreputable, they apprehended him and hustled him to Ai-defa's mansion. Samma did not take kindly to the brusque treatment he received at the hands of the guardians of the public peace. He appealed to Ptah-hetep for a testimonial of good morals, but the scholar was glad to be rid of the gluttonous winebag and considered it ample friendship to state that Samma was a Hebrew. But this news added to the misgivings of the irate Ai-defa and

he subjected the unfortunate toper to a rigorous examination as to his connections in the land, the purpose of his presence, the means of earning his livelihood, his relations to Rahuel and his confederates.

"Confederates?" Samma whistled. "If Rahuel has confederates, I may be one of them. I was with him at the Gates of the North and the South; but he escaped from the prison of *P'tehebra* and left me behind because I was too heavy to climb up the wall on a spider web. I saw him again last night, the first time since that other memorable night."

"Did you say *P'tehebra*? the governor of the North?"

"Ay, sir! *P'tehebra*; a good and honest fellow. He has a son here at the Court, a dishwasher, or something, about the kitchen of the king. I should like to meet the young man to get a position in the kitchen, so as not to be obliged every day to go hunting for a new eating place. This unsteadiness is beginning to wear me down to skin and bones. I am only a shadow of my former self. If my hair and beard should fail to grow again, I shall hire myself out for a stake in the vineyards."

"Or for a jack at the scoop-wheels?"

"Nay, sir! Against that I protest with all my inborn bravery. I have seen some service at the dikes, sir, and I would not wish a dose of that to my mortal enemy. Nay, no wheel for me!"

"Where is Rahuel?"

"He slipped away while I was asleep, without even saying goodbye. He may be anywhere, in trouble; and if there is no trouble anywhere, he will be sure to make it. But he generally gets all the wind out of the storm he conjures up. He is a born trouble maker. I am glad he is gone away."

After this assurance, which was given with apparent sincerity, Samma detailed his experiences, recounted the names of the original band of Aseneth's conductors, and was ultimately dismissed without punishment. His clownish and uncouth manner went farther with Ai-defa than anything else he might have said or done in defense of his ignorance of Rahuel and his schemes. So unwieldy and sluggish a mind could be of no use to that mercurial and unscrupulous plotter.

A few days later a messenger from Thebes was announced to Ai-defa. The chief baker was visibly agitated at the announcement. Thebes was the general headquarters of the patriotic League and the hotbed of the brewing conspiracy, and a message from the heart of treason must mean a new proof of his being implicated in the movement. He was anxious to avoid, for the present, every sign of his silent allegiance. Why must the messenger mention the name of the stigmatized town? But perhaps he wished to be sure of a hearing, of a personal interview.

The messenger was a man of middle age, tall and brawny, a very picture of an ideal warrior. He had arrived in a chariot drawn by a pair of black steeds, was simply garbed, and frugal of words. The purport of his mission was that he was to find and join one of the secret agents of the League who had been despatched to Memphis several months ago; who had delivered Ai-defa's commission as local chief; and who could be found at Anu if at this time he was no longer in Memphis. He should have taken temporary quarters with Ai-defa. Another messenger had been despatched after him to overtake him and recall Ai-defa's commission, as meanwhile damaging information had reached headquarters concerning the

double dealing of the royal baker. "Hence your post is vacated at this moment," Hakar concluded. "You must deliver to me the document."

This was news indeed. Ai-defa had paled to the teeth. But he obediently staggered to a spot in the rear wall of his chamber, opened a concealed bronze door, and extracted the unlucky document from a small metal casket. "Take it, friend and brother," he faltered. "But with it you cannot take my loyalty to the cause."

"It is my orders. Your loyalty is your personal affair."

Hakar unwound the tablet from its linen wrapping and inspected it carefully. When his eyes had reached the bottom, he gave a little start. "Ah," he exclaimed, "you have added your own seal! Do you intend to proceed without us?"

"This is not *my* seal! It is the secret seal of the sheiks of Araby and of the priesthood of Assur and Babel. How and by whom it was affixed to this paper has caused me as much care as it is causing you."

"The seal of the sheiks, you say? Not wholly the seal of the sheiks. The archpriest of the temple of Ammon at Thebes has a similar emblem embroidered on his pontifical robe and miter. Not exactly like this, but very closely similar to it. It lacks the serpent and the top arm of the perpendicular line — thus," he said, extracting a style from his waistband and scratching the sacred *Ankh* on the back of the card. "It signifies, as you well know, the name of God, the True and Immortal; the Source of eternal life. The serpent is the symbol of the *Rahu*, a fiction of the Eastern nations, who imagine that the Evil one can hold up or undo the ancient promises of a Deliverer from on high.

With them the Deliverer is already come, the false prophet, who raised himself in the place of the Almighty and ruined the integrity of the ancient traditions.¹ But who could have added this seal?"

"Who was your first messenger?"

"Ab-dedi, the son of the archpriest."

"And the second? Did Ab-dedi ever return home?"

"Ab-dedi was murdered. The second messenger was Nat-anh, who found the body of Ab-dedi; but the message had been filched from Ab-dedi's bosom when Nat-anh found him. We have witnesses to prove that Nat-anh is innocent of the fraud perpetrated against the chief council of the League."

Ai-defa rapidly recalled the names of Rahuel's brethren as Samma had told them. Among them he discovered one that sounded very like *Nat-anh*.

"*Nat-anh* is not a native name. Is the bearer a native?"

"Without the slightest doubt! He is a silversmith of Thebes, a modest man of immoderate wealth. He is mad with enthusiasm over the delivery of our country from the dastardly Hyksos invaders. It was he who furnished information concerning your defection."

"What specific charge was laid against me?"

"You have fraternized with the unripe scholars of the temple school and initiated some of them, mere boys, into the secrets of the cause; you have taken to wife an Arab maiden found in the street; you have *not interested Pent-Amen* to a degree where his own and his powerful father's resources could be made subservient to our cause!"

"Lo, the hand of Rahuel!" Ai-defa exclaimed. But after a moment he again addressed himself humbly

¹ Hom, the first false prophet. Confer: *Hom*, *passim*; especially p. 225.

to Hakar. "It is all true, Hakar," he admitted. "But the students are to be the officers of the king in the future. Zoroith is the daughter of Eophres, a noble sheik of our unruly neighbors across the sea, and Pent-Amen is a coward through insane devotion to his wife, who is a Hittite maid, and, by the way, a woman who deserves to be revered!"

"We have heard that he paid a price of two hundred pounds of gold for her?"

"*Two hundred pounds of gold* — it is true!"

"How did he obtain so immense a sum?"

"I furnished half!"

"Whence?"

"From the treasury —"

"Of the pharaoh?"

"Is it not the property of the land?"

"But not destined to be made the price of women's flesh! You were better served in picking your wife from the gutter!"

Ai-defa grew white from rage. He stepped close under Hakar's eyes, and raising his clenched fist to Hakar's face, hissed angrily: "One more word out of your mouth to the injury of my wife — and I shall break your neck!"

But Hakar remained calm and hard. "You have proved yourself unworthy of the alliance with men of sense — away, hound," he cried, striking Ai-defa a heavy blow in the face with his fist, and went out. Ai-defa staggered and fell to the floor, stunned, and bleeding from the nose and the mouth. A minute later, the rattle and clatter of the hurriedly driven chariot of Hakar was resounding in the court, and fast vanished in the distance, swallowed up by the hum and drone of the drowsy street.

For several days after this encounter Ai-defa strove with himself to recover the even balance of his mind. Now he would throw himself, heart and soul, life and limb, into the cause of the League! He would some day point his finger at Hakar, and call him a liar and a slanderer! It would be the very acme of bliss for him to prove that even while he was under a cloud, he toiled in secret, amid constant danger of detection, for the holy cause, and to upbraid publicly, and in the face of the chiefs, the *boor* who had dared to malign Zoroith, and to inflict a deathly insult on the baker of the pharaoh!

The other insult, that of having the Hyksos called "dastards" and "invaders," he might have condoned, although he himself belonged to the ruling tribe of the invaders. He had made common cause with the enemies of the Hyksos government. He had considerably gone out of his way for the pleasure of plotting. He had lent a hand to treason. Why should he not expect to be mistrusted, tested, and occasionally also to be made to feel the anomaly of his position? He would some day redeem himself from mistrust, and also, unless Hakar made timely amends, from this insult, and from the other unpardonable affront, of being struck in the face — he, an official at the Double High House, the chief minister of the royal board!

Having made this preliminary settlement of his cause against the haughty emissary of the League, Ai-defa turned towards the facts stated with regard to the former messengers.

Ab-dedi was personally known to him as a bright young man, and he was sorry to record his early and cruel death. Of *Nat-anh* he had never heard. But there was one *Nathan* among the band of Rahuel.

This *Nat-anh* had denounced him. Now, if this immoderately wealthy man was kept in touch with Memphis and the Arp-hesep without leaving Thebes, and was so intimately acquainted with Ai-defa's household affairs, he must have a confederate, or several confederates, hereabout. The seal of the sheiks must have been stamped on that message from Thebes either by *Nat-anh* himself, or by Rahuel; for Rahuel was the only man known to use that strange badge of sin and heresy. Furthermore, this *Nat-anh*, a man of immoderate wealth, would not have offered his services as messenger had he not some other more important object in view. The last message to Binyah from the Arp-hesep was written by Rahuel, and delivered to a "light and short man," according to Ai-defa's spy. A light and short man of prosperous appearance delivered the message to Binyah, and was smoked out of his reserve and dignity on the shoulders of an old king or god. The object of that message was to send away Binyah and thus to hinder her from pursuing the abductor of Zoroith. The results:

(1) Zoroith has disappeared.

(2) Rahuel has disappeared.

(3) Ai-defa and Pent-Amen are brought to the necessity either of the strictest secrecy about their allegiance, or of the strictest loyalty towards Putiphar and the pharaoh.

(4) Putiphar's attitude towards the twain suspected stewards is become quite stiff and formal notwithstanding his honest effort at conquering his suspicious and observant air.

(5) Putiphar's attitude towards Rahuel is not changed; he could have apprehended the miscreant at a moment's notice, but allowed him to escape.

Summa Summarum :

(1) Zoroith is in the power of Rahuel.

(2) *Nat-anh* is identical with *Nathan*.

(3) There is a secret circle operating for an unknown motive towards the destruction of both Pent-Amen and Ai-defa.

(4) The badge of that secret band is the seal of the sheiks.

(5) Putiphar is being made the tool of the intriguers.

(6) Above all else, Rahuel is a general of consummate skill, of diabolical temerity, and of untiring tenacity.

(7) From the start of their troubles with the first message threatening Pent-Amen with death, the whole scheme of forcing them into the open had been engineered with demon-like ingenuity, and with a depth of counsel that eluded inspection and blinded precaution.

(8) Hence, if the troubles were inaugurated for the sake of harassing Pent-Amen, the whole scheme must in some way tend towards Pent-Amen's destruction.

This was Ai-defa's last deduction: Pent-Amen is the object of Rahuel's hatred.

"Have you at any time offended that demon in human shape?" he asked of his colleague the same evening after they were dismissed from the ministrations of the royal table.

"How may you ask so mean a deed of me!" Pent-Amen exclaimed in surprise. "I would not touch that snake with a foot!"

"He is bent upon working your ruin."

"I know it, friend Ai-defa. Binyah has often told me so. But he began at the wrong end; he is ruining *you*."

"To use me as a screen!"

"Why do you not trap and hold him? He surely has deserved death at your hands. He has robbed you of peace — and of your wife!"

"Ah, do you concede so much? But he is too slippery a reptile to hold fast. Had I Putiphar's hands, I should soon hang him at the gate. But Putiphar's skirts are heavy with the tearful importunities of Nefer-hotep, and Nefer-hotep loves and admires the Hebrews."

"Not if you love your head, Ai-defa! Leave such gossip to the women! The presence of a comely young Hebrew in her house is not proof sufficient of the disloyalty of the wife of the Right Leg of the pharaoh!"

"No, indeed; not the *presence* alone. But the doting, languishing, and lingering of Nefer-hotep's eyes in that *presence*!"

"Not another word, Ai-defa! It is a terrible slander. Binyah would die to hear such fearful slander borne abroad about herself, and Nefer-hotep also is a woman."

"Ay, friend. But Binyah would never deserve to be slandered because she is a better woman than that shrew in a high place!"

"Guard your tongue — your tongue, Ai-defa! By the happiness of the Dead, Ai-defa, take it back! You are tempting me to denounce you for your wicked tongue."

"Have you anything with Rahuel? One of his friends and former companions has told me that Rahuel at one time was a prisoner at your father's station at the Northern Wall?"

"And escaped?"

"Yes, escaped with nearly a score of the sorry band."

"And was flogged?"

"He did not speak of it. How should Samma know? He did not escape with Rahuel, and no Hebrew would voluntarily confess to so humiliating a chastisement."

"I had word from my father a year ago to the effect that he killed with the whip a band of absconding and insubordinate Hebrews whose leader was a man of parts, of indomitable pride, of the strength of the leopard. His name was Rahuel, or Raguel."

"Did your father name any others of the band?"

"Yes; *Nat-anh*, of slight and short figure, Zambri, Ben-Eder. One of those who remained in prison was Samma, a giant and poltroon, and another was Phares, their true leader, a man of gentle nature and cool sense."

"*Nat-anh*? Pish! It is Nathan, the abductor of Zoroith! And Rahuel was whipped to death by your father? The whip only killed the *man* Rahuel; the brute has survived. The lust of revenge for an insult so deathly cannot be killed by the whip. I can easily picture to myself that a man of 'indomitable pride' would force himself to live for the sheer pleasure of a fiendish revenge. Here is the solution of Rahuel's riddle! You are a doomed man, Pent-Amen!"

"But I will keep clean hands and a silent tongue. So far he has only injured you who have through resentment, born of a bad conscience, snapped at his bait. I will show sincerer trust to my Binyah than you have shown to your Zoroith!"

This last rebuke disarmed Ai-defa, because it was fully merited. Had he ignored the fiend slinking in the dark as Pent-Amen ignored him, and had he not frivolously doubted the faithful and upright Zoroith who had on no occasion given him cause for suspicion, and had he not been overzealous in his propaganda of the cause of the League, his bliss and peace would yet

be whole. Had he patiently waited for the serpent to come forth from hiding and show its head, he could have crushed it without trouble. But Ai-defa was leading two lives, that of the honest man, in public, and privately, that of the traitor. How else could it happen that by a mere chance, by an uncommon shadow falling across his way, he should be made to look behind, and face the specter of his own true evil self? Then he would be obliged to take up arms and wage war against the phantom for his own protection. He would be divided against himself, untrue to himself, an incarnate lie, false, fickle, and ferocious. He had already harvested the spring crop of his evil sowing.

"I will accept this unkind thrust from your hand in patience," he answered Pent-Amen. "I have deserved it. But I have received so many thrusts these days that my heart is as a heart studded with daggers. I have wronged Zoroith. Would I could find her! This head would no longer be too proud to bow down and kiss the imprint of her foot in the dust of the street! These eyes I would tame and train to see no more beauty but Zoroith's beauty, and these hands I would give to her in place of pages and bondmaids!"

"Would you also for love of her renounce your allegiance to the conspirators?" Pent-Amen asked soberly and impressively.

But Ai-defa hung his head, and left Pent-Amen's house without the usual evening salutation. Going down the steps into the court, he murmured to himself. "Picked up from the gutter," he groaned. "Hakar! You liar and demon!"





Chapter Thirty-fourth

A BLOODY DEED

RAHUEL was not destined to enjoy his retreat in peace. Shortly after nightfall he noticed two men entering the park where he had taken refuge. There was nothing extraordinary about their movements. They came sauntering along leisurely and freely with the air of men of estate. But they were outrageously ill paired. The one was of stature far below the average height, light and short, and Rahuel's heart tingled to recognize in him at a distance his boon companion Nathan. The other measured well above the average height, was well built, easy of manner, and of a girth that spelled comfort and prosperity. He wore the garb of the lowest priestly class, robes, veil, cincture and tassels, lacking only the miter. He was off duty. There was a scent of familiarity about him which attracted Rahuel's sympathy and curiosity. But he could not instantly place the man. These two nocturnal visitors proceeded far towards the interior of this resort of solitude and peace where they were withdrawn from view by dense arbors of flowering vines.

A little later, Hakar also entered. Rahuel did not know him personally, but judged from the dignified deportment of this stately personage, and especially from the flock of servants who silently followed him at

a distance of many steps, that he was a man of means and consequence. After another pause of half an hour, visitors trooped and thronged into the park by the dozens and scores. What Rahuel had considered the most safe and solitary hiding-place, was gradually turning into a place of public recreation. He might at any moment be discovered in his bower of vines and fig trees, and had already resolved to step out and mix with the crowd, when presently he discovered, among a group of pleasure-seekers, the girl whom he had tossed aside in the morning at the landing. He spat out from disgust at his ill luck, and drawing a scroll of parchment from his bosom and unrolling and spreading it on the ground, he lay down and laid his head on the scroll. If he was to be disturbed, none should say that a man who used a diagram from the celebrated stone-yards of Memphis for a pillow had no right to seclude himself by night in the public park, whither even the poets were wont to retire for inspiration.

That particular maiden whom, of all the rest, he remembered with some interest for having come in such unpleasant contact with her, seemed just to be bent upon stumbling over him. As he furtively peered through the confused branches and foliage of his hiding-place, he saw how she was drawing her companions, one after the other, by the sleeves, to persuade them that they should follow her in the direction she pointed out, the direction, of course, of Rahuel's isolated nook. But the others so much enjoyed the bright and mellow light of the moon laughing down at them with full, broad face, that they declined to leave it for the darker shadowy grove where they heard the sleepy twittering of song-birds disturbed in their repose, and where insects and adders might be lurking in the hedge.

"But it is so idyllic," he heard the busy maid exclaim, "so poetic, to play hide and seek with the moon, and to let her run her silvery fingers down your face and body while you may be thinking of your distant lover!" And despite their disinclination, her companions were ever drawn nearer and nearer to the grove by her gestures and her motions of the body which simulated a dance that was the vogue of that day, the dance of the new *goddess*. It was a graceful striding and swaying on tip-toe; a waving of the arms, with the skirt of the ample gown held up daintily at the sides to the height of the shoulders between the tips of the first fingers, and waving rhythmically in imitation of the wings of a butterfly; the dancer all the while lightly and slowly turning in a wide circle. During her performance, the girl was humming the soft strains of a love song.

Gradually the other girls caught the charm of the melody and the dance, and broke forth in subdued voices with the song, taking it up from the beginning and following, at first only with their eyes, every motion, stride, and turn of their cunning leader. But they were soon also actively drawn into the pretty game, and all joining hands in a circle about her, were moving forward with her into the spotted and dotted shadows of a group of tall, vine-covered palm trees.

Here the maid of Rahuel's especial acquaintance in their midst continued leading the dancers through many intricate and interesting evolutions, until at length she began to prepare for an artistic finish. She extended a hand right and left to one dancer on each side of her, catching this hand and that out of the air, and deftly swung the lithe figures from their positions in the circle, exchanging them and making them pass

around her under her arms. After this neat little trick, which was executed without a moment's cessation of the exercise, she lightly swung them back into their respective places, and took up and put through the same trick another pair, and another, until all had in this manner playfully made their obeisance to their fairy queen. Then she caught a hand of each of two moving together, and drawing them along with her, broke the round in the opposite side, thus placing herself at the head of two semi-circles, and being flanked right and left by one of her pretty attendants. Without pausing she retreated, holding the hands of her immediate neighbors; and drawing both flanks after her, she again formed and joined the circle together, she having obtained a position outside, like the stone of a finger ring. Thereupon she released the hands of the maids in front of her, and the ring parted and spread out into a crescent, leaving her standing alone in the same pretty pose with which she had opened the dance.

All these young faces were now shining with happiness, and with admiration for their skilful leader, and all these young souls were ready with one accord to hail her as their queen in the fascinating art of drawing both grace and joy from an exercise that had heretofore appealed to them merely as another mode of indulging a hilarious mood. The proud damsel felt this atmosphere of admiration playing about her, and, indulging an impulse partly infused by the universal, grateful joy of the feast-days, and partly, also, by girlish vanity, she exclaimed: "Do I not look like Aseneth upon her throne, attended by reverent cherubs!"

The girls clapped their hands with gleeful approbation of her comical boast, and she released her "cherubs," who forthwith scattered and broke flowers and leafy

vines about Rahuel's bower, twined a garland, and solemnly crowned their model of Aseneth, the new deity.

Rahuel was startled. They were so close upon him that, if anyone should happen to take a fancy to that particularly shadowy spot — and girls easily take all manner of fancies — she could not but fall over him. Then he would again be made the he-goat which he had impersonated in the morning.

But the mildly excited and somewhat exalted maidens soon settled down in the grass around their leader, sitting down, or lying prone with their chin in their upturned hands and their elbows on the ground, or squatting on their heels; but they had moved so dangerously near Rahuel's lair that he was afraid of his own breath.

"Now, Neht-nefert," one said, flatteringly addressing herself to the chief of the jolly mischief-makers, "tell us what you know of this new divinity. She is a pretty girl, I confess. She must be very, very pious, too — much more pious than I. But they say she is a prophetess. So she is bound by her profession to be more pious than the rest of us. Is she a reincarnation of the ancient goddess of Anu, the venerable Hathor? She is not married. She has not even a lover! It may be a great pleasure to be seated on a throne of flowers high above the heads of the poor mortals in the street — but, by Hathor and Nebt together! It is not so sweet as to be free, and to be courted, and to be admired, and to be sought in marriage by twenty love-lorn swains at once!"

"I would give your twenty love-lorn swains in exchange, and a dozen to boot," Neht-nefert answered pertly, "for that majestic Hebrew who was our traveling

companion on the River! He is a man! Proud, tall, strong, fine! He picked me up and tossed me aside like a fig! I wish he had put me in his belt like a fig!"

"No; in his mouth!" one joined in humorously. "It is big enough at once to accommodate two and three figs, and not feel crowded! Go away with your Hebrews! Domestic goods are a more reliable article. The wife of Putiphar has the most handsome of all Hebrews in her house, and the things that are said of the woman would be no credit to a slave! The boy is wary, they say; and, in truth, who should not be wary in the presence of such a shrew as is the wife of Putiphar! But the Hebrews think nothing of holding a brace of wives. I should not wonder if they thought little of capturing another man's wife! Nay, no Hebrew need apply to me!"

"Slowly, my maid," a soft, but sad voice was heard to warn the traducer of Nefer-hotep and the Hebrews. Rahuel started at the sound of that voice, and involuntarily raised his head. The parchment crackled and rustled. He returned instantly to his former position, with the result that there was more crackling and rustling, and the girls became attentive. "An adder!" one cried, and sprang up, bending forward on tip-toe, curved stiffly like a bow, and stretching her slender neck like a hen interested in some object lying in the water, without an idea of touching it.

Everyone was up on her feet in an instant.

"It may be a toad, or a frog," another suggested breathlessly, "or a mouse!" another simpered with ill-feigned bravery.

"I wish I were a lion instead of being a disreputable Hebrew," Rahuel sighed inwardly with no small measure of sincerity.

"Why do you not arise, Zoroith?" Neht-nefert cried at the only one that had remained seated in the grass.

"It is nothing," she replied. "If it is anything, it is a man. Reptiles and vermin do not thrive in this carefully kept and much frequented park."

"A man!" they gasped with one accord. "Your Hebrew, Neht," one urged in a whisper. "He is just a man to sleep under the open sky, stuck away from the gay companionship of the festive guests of the city! Let us look!"

But none dared, much as they all desired, to push a curious head through the dense foliage. They might with equal curiosity and indecision have stood before a closed coffin. "Let us wait until he comes out!" they parleyed shudderingly.

"Siege!" all cried together, but melted away in the course of a few minutes, leaving Neht-nefert and Zoroith alone at that dangerous refuge of a *man*.

Rahuel was harboring feelings of a decidedly mixed character in his bosom. It was a torture for him to listen to them cackling about Aseneth, and about Nefer-hotep and Joseph, and the Hebrews in general, and that "proud, tall, strong and fine Hebrew" in particular, and not to be permitted to step out among them and to cleanse their tainted views with a mouthful of acrimonious opinion of his own concerning their arrogance. And to hear them handle Zoroith, the dainty, the injured, the stricken, as familiarly as they might handle a doll! There must be a feast in progress of celebration, of which Aseneth was the object. They had called her a goddess, and prophetess — what strange things was he about to learn in the mystic city of Hathor and Ra?

But he could not long pursue his rummaging. Neht-nefert snuggled close to Zoroith and began an animated, whispered conversation, of which he understood barely a stray word here and there. The name of *Nat-anh* recurred frequently, and the contemptuous *Ebri* of Binyah, of which Nathan had given him a graphic and illustrated description, flew from her lips like a feathered dart straight into his haughty breast.

At last Zoroith raised her voice a little, as she essayed to make a gallant defense of the Hebrews. "One of them saved me from the watery grave of the sea," she said, "although at that time my own father had been driving them into the deathly rapids of the reefs. He was a great and good man, one of those from whom God selects both his heroes and his fools. But he deserted me after a mishap in the streets of Memphis. God does not select, for places of power and honor, men who have no heart. He makes them into fools, and" — threateningly — "Rahuel shall be made a fool some day!"

It was scant comfort for Rahuel to hear such a summary sentence pronounced on his destiny, and, especially, on his lack of heart.

"Did you love him when you walked with him, you, the daughter of a prince, with a foreign beggar, in the streets of Memphis?"

"I did; deeply and tenderly!"

"Why did he not ask you to marry him?"

"Monsters do not seek mates! And it is well that they do not. A pity were the brood!"

"But you were married in the city?"

"No!"

"To Ai-defa!"

"No!"

"But you are Ai-defa the butler's wife!"

"I do not know the man!"

"Are you united to Nathan?"

"I am not. He is impertinent enough to pass me around as his wife, but I am not Nathan's wife!"

"But you have left a child, a motherless boy, at Memphis, in the house of Ai-defa!"

Zoroith sighed, but made no answer.

"Would you marry that Rahuel if you should happen to find him?"

"No, my dear little chatterbox. I would have married him one time before I knew that he bore the heart of a hyena in the breast of a man; but now I should even refuse to salute him. His name is a black cloud in my memory. Let us hence!" And she arose.

"Would you not see whether there is a man concealed in that bower?" affectedly whimpered Neht-nefert.

"Go and see for yourself. I will stand on guard!"

"I am afraid, alone —!"

"Then come. The man concealed in that bush does not care for me, and I am not interested in him."

"But I will look — just a peep!"

"Come, maid! It ill becomes a sister of the noble Pent-Amen to prowl around here for a man in the dark!" Nevertheless the wilful girl cautiously threaded her way through the grass and with palpitating heart approached the thicket. Rahuel arose, and as she shyly pushed her arms and head through the matted vines, he grasped both her arms with one hand, and with the other tightly covered her mouth. Then he drew her in, regardless of the damage done to her garments and her skin.

"Now, my dear little chatterbox," he hoaxed in

imitation of Zoroith's compliment, "not a word from these ruby lips, not a cry!" And he unsheathed a savage blade and set the point of it on her breast. "*The sister of Pent-Amen!*" he gurgled. "What precious game!"

His precaution of warning her was superfluous. She was half dead from terror. This was Rahuel, the man whose breast she had patted that morning, the same also, of whom Zoroith had said such uncomplimentary things! Adding her uncereemonious entrance into his presence, she had reason enough to keep her peace.

Rahuel, seeing that she was speechless and numb, left her a moment to observe what course Zoroith would pursue after the disappearance of the girl. But Zoroith seemed little disposed to interfere as yet. She quietly arose, took a few steps towards the arbor, then suddenly turned aside and ran away towards the interior of the park.

"She will fetch Nathan," he said to himself. "And then I shall dispose of you, my pretty bird," he continued again, bending over the pallid, terror-stricken Neht-nefert. "I may have to amputate your sharp tongue to keep you from betraying me. You are too precious a victim, girl, not to be immolated!"

After a while, the maid began to wriggle like a worm. She was recovering from the paroxysms of her sudden fright, and returning to consciousness. Rahuel went down on one knee at her side with the dagger poised over her heart. He caught at the frantically clutching hands, gathering both together in his palm and pressing them down on her breast. She opened her eyes with a snap, and saw the gleaming steel raised over her: one quick, desperate, frantic jerk, and with a cry she

leaped into the air — the dagger buried to the hilt in her bosom. A slight convulsion, and she was dead. Rahuel drew out the knife, traced the “seal of the sheiks” on her bared breast with the point of the blade, and after wiping away the blood on her tattered skirt, plunged out of the arbor.

When Zoroith returned with Nathan and that portly companion of his, who presented himself in the person of Phares, and found the body of the murdered girl, she knelt down in silent grief, pressing her lips for an instant on the gaping wound. The moon was high in the heavens and brilliantly bright, sifting its silvery rays through the whispering foliage, and playing them tremblingly over the still, blood-bespattered form. On arising, Zoroith pointed out on the girl’s breast the “seal” of which Phares was ignorant. But Nathan cried out: “The steel of Rahuel!” And Zoroith, after a brief pause of violent emotion assented, adding emphatically: “Yea, even of Rahuel, the Fool!”





Chapter Thirty-fifth

A VISION

RAHUEL was fully conscious of what the consequences of his bloody deed would be, but felt no remorse on that account. The murdered girl was the daughter of P'tehebra, and that was ample salve for his injured conscience. Pent-Amen, her brother, who stood close to the king, would be wary of invoking the aid of the law for running to ground the murderer, because the law was only waiting for an opportunity to enmesh Pent-Amen himself for the suspicion of treason.

For the same reason, that of saving his son, P'tehebra would have to proceed under cover once that he was made aware of the precarious position of his son. Moreover, although Rahuel had signed his name, as it were, to the misdeed, by leaving behind him on the breast of Neht-nefert his peculiar seal, yet it would be impossible to prove in open court that this signature was his alone. Ai-defa and Pent-Amen knew for a certainty that it was his sign, and that of his secret confederates; but the circumstances under which they had gained this certainty were so densely interwoven with their own false dealings, that airing them in court would be equivalent to a public confession of their alliance with the banned leaguers.

He had gained his point. He had struck a blow of

revenge at P'tehebra, and had made sure of P'tehebra's learning from his son that the blow was struck by the man whom P'tehebra had meant to kill with the whip. It was a good beginning, he thought, after so patient a preparation of his work. That blow would go home to the heart of both men, and teach them that a man from the East would ask blood for blood, and more blood for his honor than for his blood.

But it was to be only the prelude to the catastrophe that he was preparing for them, in which they should be brought down, house and home, kith and kin, in a heap of ruin. It was only the testing snap of the whip which he would from now on unremittingly hold over them, until he should force them to go down on their knees before him, the incarnate *Rahu*, the avenger of God.

He could have killed Pent-Amen with the same swiftness and assurance of safety. But would a hunter kill the decoy-bird and lose the game? Even heart-wounds heal in time. For the present, P'tehebra was provided with a sorrow intense enough to demand protracted and pensive nursing. For the future, Rahuel held in store a surprise for him that would take him off his feet, and lay him on the altar of Rahuel's revenge; and not only him, but also his sons, his daughters and his wife, as a holocaust, of which nothing should remain but the ashes — the disgraced memory of the haughty governor of the North.

That night Rahuel went into the temple. It was a place of refuge, and although he did not for an instant think that he would be obliged to invoke the privilege of the refugees of Shem and Ra, still the temple afforded shelter for a day of rest and promised immunity from the impertinence of the crowds of visitors who might have heard of the rudeness shown by a tall, lone stranger

towards Neht-nefert in the morning of the day of her doom. And undoubtedly also Nathan had taken up his quarters at the temple, as was evidenced by his keeping the company of priests. Nathan may even have established Zoroith in one of the hostelries lying within the sacred precincts and belonging to the temporalities of the holy shrine.

Rahuel easily gained admission to the courts of the huge edifice. His credentials as a disciplinarian of the *Per-anh* of Memphis were as good as a key for opening both the doors and the hearts of the trusting priestly pedagogues the land over, who knew no greater honor than to show deference to the learned. The doorkeeper thought he recognized in him a way-worn visitor, a pilgrim to the great festivities of the week, and offered to supply him with wine and bread. But Rahuel ceremoniously declined, stating that he was well provided with means that would save him from asking the hospitality of the priests.

"But I have a desire at heart," he continued confidentially, and yet not without the dignified reserve of the great, "a desire," he repeated solemnly, "which has nearly consumed my heart with burning."

The priestly doorkeeper, one of the third class of priests, who were not recognized as belonging to the hieratic caste, looked up expectantly at the portly, stately figure, and bowed low to signify his willingness of serving the great man.

"I would see Aseneth!" Rahuel said curtly.

"My deepest regrets, Lord my Master. But the *Diva*¹ is in her sacred fane wrapped in prayer and meditation! She may not be disturbed!"

¹ *Diva*: deva, diu, thiot, deus: *the godly*; the most antique name of the Deity in the Orient, common in one form or another to all the ancient languages.

"But I am a countryman of hers!"

"But you are not a priest, and none but a priest dare approach her in these days of her holiness."

"Bosh," Rahuel was tempted to scold aloud, but contented himself with a mental exclamation, and continued: "In the tents of Jacob, every goodman of the house is a priest; Phares is my brother!"

"Phares —?" thoughtfully. Then he clapped his hands, and a page came out from the adjoining cloister.

"Lead this Master of the *Per-anh* to His Highness, the Lord Nutri-Hon!" he directed, and motioned to Rahuel to follow the boy.

The Nutri-Hon, or "chief prophet" of the temple at Anu was P'hotepra,¹ a man of sterling quality. He was the guardian of the ancient faith as it was transferred by the Hamites from the Chaldees several hundred years before the selection and segregation of Abraham from the idolaters of Ur. At that early period the superstitions of the heretics of India, whence was derived the whole stream and flood of idolatry that later inundated the ancient world, had not yet encroached on the traditional patriarchal faith. Even on the occasion of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, its pristine integrity had been but little impaired,² although religious practises had begun to be corrupted on account of the admixture of the Chaldaic form of worship practised by several of the tribes of the conquerors.

The popular worship of Anu in Aseneth's time was a close approach to stark idolatry, its only redeeming feature being the eagerness of the public to seize upon

¹ P'hotepra: the *Putiphare* of Genesis. This name, like the name Caiaphas, Cephas, and Caiphas, occurs under different forms, probably identical in meaning: "*He serving Ra.*"

² Josephus Flavius: *Jewish Antiquities*, I, 8; 1-2.

any manifestation of the Divine as a welcome opportunity of broaching the pent-up religious sentiments of a God-hungry people. The people were not as scrupulous as the priests of the inner shrine in discriminating the various forms of worship, as long as any of them or all satisfied their craving for a prayer to the Supreme Arbiter of the lots of men; for the noblest occupation of men is prayer. Whether God were symbolized by the sun, or the moon, or the great Lord Neb; or the divine bounty were reflected by the kindly face of Isis, who was in truth only a collective name of the attributes of the mercy and goodness of God; or God were brought nearer to them by the dower of heavenly favors manifested in select representatives of God, as in the kings and the priests, mattered little to the devout mind of the people.

Had the priests remained faithful to their charge of teaching the ancient traditions to the people and of keeping them free from accretions of error, there would never have been a heathen era to record of Egypt or of any other ancient country. But the priests grew faint in their war against the fickleness of the people, and against the overreaching aggression of demagogues, and the incessant ebullition of popular enthusiasm over things pertaining to the Divine. They furled the banner of truth and secreted it beneath the altar, leaving the people entrusted to them for enlightenment — not without war; not without designing leaders; not without enthusiasm; but without the ensign of the custodian of their fate. Wearied with disputing, tired of imposition, sobered from a daring digression, the people always had known whither to turn for a word of direction, for a hint of caution, or for a tap of correction, as long as dutiful watchmen had

been keeping guard over the shrine of Truth in the House of God. But when the priests left the watch tower and hid behind the screens of the sanctuary, they abandoned their flocks to the depredations of ravening wolves who soon appeared on the scene in the form both of impersonated wickedness and of the unfettered inborn passions of the frail human breast.

After P'hoteptra had inspected Rahuel's papers, he accorded him a hearty welcome. The meeting took place in the temple where the archpriest was directing the arrangements for the pageant to be celebrated in honor of Aseneth in the morning, early, before sunrise. All Anu had been asleep throughout the hot afternoon and the first two pleasant hours of the evening; and even now the city was again falling into slumber, after having made ready her festive robes for the coming day's rejoicing, dozing with one eye open, as it were; for in every house a lamp was kept burning by which to light, without loss of time, the torches for the festal procession, and by which to put on, in the twilight of the rousing day, the rich attire and elaborate adornments that were to grace the great day of the new prophetess.

Aseneth had protested. Aseneth had wept. Aseneth had conjured the priests by the Living God. "It is no curtailing of the honor due to God, the giver of all good things," she had been told for consolation, "if we honor you for the marks of the exceeding grace He has bestowed upon you."

"But the people will do me honor in the place of the Most High!" she had defended herself.

"The people love you; but they love you for the sake of Him who has made you great. If they lay their homage at your feet, the imprint of which has

sanctified the pavement of this holy house, do not think it misplaced! Were it not for Heaven's favors, you would be nothing! But if Heaven has stooped to woo you — why would you restrain a devout people from joining hands with Heaven?"

Aseneth had then understood that resistance against the celebration planned by both priests and people would be useless. She resigned herself to the inevitable, and stormed heaven day and night with her appeals for the people of Anu, that they might take sense, and not make an idol of her. But there was no danger of the ingestion of superstition into the celebration. The people simply insisted on honoring Him who had graciously vouchsafed to honor their city with intrusting to her one of the few select vessels of His immense goodness.¹

Rahuel boldly repeated his request to the high priest. But P'hoteptra shook his head. "Not tonight," he said decisively. "The maid is facing an ordeal that could unnerve a man. She must be let alone!"

"But I may comfort her. I am a tribesman of hers, and a brother to Phares!"

"She requires no comfort such as man can give; and the only comfort to soothe her, she is seeking for herself, in prayer. She has never turned a smiling face upon any man."

"May I not at least see her from afar, and feast my eyes on her piety? I am consumed with the desire of seeing the child for whom once I toiled and suffered much without regret!"

"I will take you to her chapel, if you promise me upon your head and the head of Abraham, that you will in no wise disturb her devotion."

¹ See *Hom.*

"I promise by the bones of Abraham!"

Why was Rahuel so anxious to see the child in whom he had had no interest for several years? First of all, he had nothing else to do that night. Secondly, he might be obliged to flee from the city before morning. Thirdly, he would persuade her to decline divine honors, for though he was steeped in crime, he had never been inclined to forsake and deny the faith of Jacob and his fathers. Hence he followed P'hotepra with the alertness of a hound bent on breaking from the leash at the scent of the quarry.

"Will you offer incense to her?" he asked P'hotepra under way.

"No," the priest replied cautiously; "only flowers, the emblems of her beauty and sweetness."

Rahuel was relieved, and tip-toed through the temple in silence. In passing, he watched the busy men who were draping a high car, and the sprightly maidens who were hanging festoons on the sides of the car, which was stationed in the middle of the temple beneath the open square in the roof. Others were decorating columns and portals with garlands, festoons and wreaths of fresh green and gay flowers. These preparations surely augured well for the jubilant celebration of the day.

After they had traversed the temple, the Nutri-Hon conducted Rahuel through a long dark passage-way, the several turns of which were in reality nothing else than so many landings of a slowly ascending stairway. They had already climbed up half-a-dozen flights of stairs of many steps each, and had measured hundreds of feet of hallways to and fro, without a light, when at last they arrived in the open, at a height which overlooked the roofs of the gigantic hypostyles

of the temple. Now Rahuel discovered by the light of the stars that they had passed upwards through the cloister, or the house of the priests. This structure was erected in the rear of the temple at a distance of about a hundred feet from the sanctuary, and was connected with the temple by a covered passage-way which rose in terraces until it reached the entrance of the cloister. From that point they had continued to climb up inside the house.

The roof of the cloister on which they had arrived was built of solid stone flags, and, like the roof of the temple, showed a rectangular opening in the middle, from which was reflected upwards a faint glimmer of light. P'hotepra once more warned his guest not to undertake anything that might attract the attention of Aseneth, and having received Rahuel's solemn pledge and oath, he took him by the hand and led him to the open square.

The scene with which Rahuel was instantly confronted dazzled his curious, eager gaze. The space occupied by the top story of the house, and lying directly beneath him, was a small temple in itself, facing the opening from all four sides. It was lit up with a thousand pendant bronze lamps of quaint make and antique appearance, with golden bands and silver chains. Its furnishings consisted in several tiers of carved and lavishly draped seats arranged in rows along the three sides that he could inspect.

In the middle of the section opposite to where he was standing, was towering a throne of curious workmanship in wood and bronze, ornamented with figures, bands, scrolls, lamps, and flower designs in gold and silver and lustrous enamel, and hung with figured and bordered tapestries of byssus. A flight of twelve steps

led up to its seat. The steps were of polished red marble, twelve feet across, and rose in three sections of four steps each. At every section there was a landing of a depth of about four feet. In the middle of the steps was spread a soft mat of bulrushes decorated with flowers and birds in natural and vivid colors.

But these features of the chapel, which should indeed have been unheard-of curiosities to the sight of an Oriental from the tents and pastures of herdsmen, did at first not attract the interest of Rahuel. They overwhelmed him with their multitude and splendor of material and design, and left an indelible impression on his memory; but his gaze was caught and held by a vision of a greater, nobler, and more fascinating beauty. Right opposite him was Aseneth on her knees, her arms outstretched, her eyes uplifted towards heaven, her face translucent with an internal light, her whole figure immovable, enraptured, and surrounded as with a halo of the seven colors of the rainbow. There were tears in her limpid eyes, tears that had been halted, and that filled the eyes brimful with the expression of ineffable tenderness, dread, and resignation.

P'hoteptra touched Rahuel's arm. But Rahuel was not yet ready to leave. He had not even felt the touch of the priest's hand. He was staring and peering at the angelic figure, unconsciously scanning and making note of every detail of the apparition: of the transfigured face that seemed bright with an unearthly light, of the pleadingly extended arms, of the tiara above that marble brow, of the priestly girdle and cords encircling her waist and trailing on the floor beside her, of the sacrificial veil flowing down from the embroidered head-band of the tiara over her shoulders and arms, and enwrapping the plain, austere, simple

white garb in which she was clad; and the thousand lights that vied with each other to shed some earthly luster over such unearthly brightness, and succeeded rather in dimming the splendor of the picture.

"What a vision this would be in the dark!" Rahuel whispered with breathless wonder, at last mechanically responding to the repeated touch of P'hoteptra on his shoulders.


Rahuel had no more misgivings concerning the worship of Aseneth. He would seek an opportunity in the morning to tender his homage to her, were it only by tossing a wreath on her car of state. He imagined he had been accorded a look into that heaven of which Jacob used to relate at home, that it was opened above him, and that he had seen the angels of God coming and going through its bright portals. Now a look at his belt, where was concealed his dagger, made him reel for an instant, so that P'hoteptra reached him a hand for support. What would Aseneth say of him if she knew that his blade had hardly cooled from the heart's blood of the young, merry, and pretty Neht-nefert?





Chapter Thirty-sixth

THE BANNER OF HORUS

HE reports of the wonderful ecstasies of Aseneth had long reached Memphis, and had thence run the course of all communication in the narrow strip of fertile land, up the river to Thebes, spreading right and left, to Punt and the Arabian desert off the eastern bank, and to the several oases and the borders of the Lybian desert off the western bank of the Nile. Naturally enough, the interest shown in the strange phenomenon decreased rapidly in the region above Memphis, the seat of disaffection towards everything that proceeded from both the capitals of the hated Hyksos invaders. Yet so full a flood of light out of a closed heaven, which had not spoken or stirred since the immemorial days of the patriarchs of the Flood, could not fail to be noted at least by the priesthood and by those among the hereditary princes who had not lost all reverence for the ancient national traditions.

The visions of Aseneth with their attending rapture and absence of repulsive after-effects in the seeress, such as foaming at the mouth and paroxysms of alternating hilarity and depression, were essentially distinct from the visions of the professional soothsayers, as proceeding from an essentially different, purer and more congenial source.

The pharaoh had for a long time turned a deaf ear to such news coming from Anu. He was well informed of the old-time doctrines of both faith and morality, and discountenanced from habit and conviction every sort of religious innovation. Superstition, in his opinion, was far too rife among his subjects to need encouragement from high places.

But at last he began to pay heed to the assurances given by his priests of the genuineness of Aseneth's ecstasies and of the sacredness of her inspirations. When, therefore, the enthusiasm of Anu had reached a height where it would lift the prophetess out of the seclusion of the temple and accord her public homage, he did not think it derogatory to his own sublime dignity, or scandalous to the religious instincts of his people, to rise up and honor the feast days with the splendor of his presence. And Apepi¹ arose and journeyed to Anu for the honor of the mysterious maid from the tents of *Hek-Jacob*.²

The pharaoh was accompanied by the entire Court. His chancellor, or "Right Leg," was obliged to lay down his burdensome office for a little while and take upon himself the office of quartermaster to the Royal House. Pent-Amen and Ai-defa were also sent ahead to make the necessary arrangements for the royal board, which on so rare an occasion as the public appearance of Apepi for the grace of a subject, were to be lavish and extensive.

Nefer-hotep, the irrepressible, traveled in the company of the ladies of the royal household, and was attended by Joseph, the steward of Putiphar's house. It would have had a better face in the sight of those

¹ *Apepi*, the *Apophis* of the Greek writers.

² "*Prince Jacob*" — the patriarch.

who were intimately acquainted with Nefer-hotep's ways, if Putiphar in person had been more attentive to his spouse, or if Nefer-hotep had not paid more attention to Joseph than he seemed inclined to pay to her. But Putiphar's business was to be about the king, and Nefer-hotep's business was jealously her own.

There was no lack of comment, pointed and patent, regarding the foolish woman who paraded before the public the scandal which must some day work her disgrace. Nor was the purblind confidence of the busy chancellor spared from the criticism of the offended dames. He should not neglect a young wife, they thought, and thus turn her into the way of her ruin.

The royal Court, retinue and train, arrived on the morning when Rahuel had witnessed the scene of the raptured vision of Aseneth in the cloister of the priests. At the same time Hakar, the emissary from Thebes, Phares, and Nathan with Zoroith returned to the temple courts where they had taken lodgings. Rahuel, after noticing their arrival, and trying to watch each of the men repair to his quarters, and especially Nathan with his interesting charge, so as to be able to find the one or the other as might be required during his stay, left the courts and went about inspecting the temple and seeking a point of vantage from which to watch the coming pageant. But the first man he met in the temple was Pent-Amen, stalking about in obvious oblivion of himself and his object. Rahuel had no sooner descried him than he retreated to the outer colonnades, and thence issued into the courts, where he applied at Phares' quarters for admission.

Phares was in no rosy humor. As soon as he set eyes on Rahuel, he flew at him with a hot rebuke for

the murder of Neht-nefert, and refused to return Rahuel's salutation. Although he had not seen his former comrade in several years, he seemed determined nevermore to renew acquaintance with him after he had ripened into so hideous a monster.

"What have you done, coward?" he cried. "Are you not afraid to carry the blood of the girl into the House of God? 'Blood for blood,' and 'Who spilleth the blood of a man, let his blood be spilled!' Your knife is still warm with her blood — dastard and knave that you are! Away, monster, out of the sacred precincts of the shrine of Aseneth!" And Phares, contrary to his usual meekness of manner, strode up to Rahuel and with both hands pushed him towards the door.

"Ho, friend Phares," Rahuel replied cynically, but with a remarkable show of restraint of his rising anger. "It was not a *man* — it was only a *girl* that I expedited beyond the toils of this vale of tears! But moderate your fervor, brother! Pent-Amen is about the temple. If he hears of the deed, it will make him unfit to wait with becoming dignity upon his lord the pharaoh."

"And it will make you unfit to remain here and live! Pent-Amen has heard of the cowardly deed, and has inspected the body of his murdered sister: he has seen the mark of the '*Rahu*' on her breast —"

Phares evidently loathed the sight of Rahuel too much to finish his tirade; he hesitated, and shot a look of hatred at his unbidden guest.

"Well?" Rahuel questioned. "Of course, he fully knows who killed his sister?"

Phares stepped close to Rahuel.

"He fully knows who killed his sister, you say? There is more to tell, and a good deal more that may

well turn your heart within you! Pent-Amen knelt down at the corpse of Neht-nefert, and kissed the gap in her heart, and laid his right hand upon it and swore an oath in silence. Then he dipped the point of his dagger in her blood and with it traced a cancelation mark across the mark of the '*Rahu*.' He has despatched messengers to his father and brothers, who will arrive here before the king will return to Memphis. Then you shall be brought to justice before the throne of the pharaoh!"

"They can prove nothing unless they betray themselves! Bah, they are wretched curs whom I could kick under the feet of the king's throne without provoking a rebuke. Both Pent-Amen and Ai-defa shall yet hang before I will release them from my hands! But how has Zoroith come to Anu, and how may her doting knight let her go about the city exposing her to the danger of being reclaimed by Ai-defa?"

"Nathan is as big a rogue as you! If you fear not the king, how would you have him fear the king's baker?"

"But he has taken Zoroith unto his own! Ai-defa is as likely as not to kill her now as he threatened and was about to kill her once before, if he cannot take her back as his unsullied wife."

"She will not go back!"

"Does she love Nathan?"

"Zoroith to love a brute? She should have remained with her lord, had she wished to love a brute!"

"You are well informed?"

"And it is well that there are not more here as well informed as I! — Go out from here! Your very shadow is a pest in this house!"

"I have seen Aseneth."

"Not by the God of Abraham!" Phares shrieked.

"But I have, nevertheless! The God of Abraham is not as jealous as you and her other keepers."

"And did she not pronounce a curse upon your head and your hand? You are a liar, Rahuel! Own it, that you are a liar!"

"Phares ——" Rahuel unsheathed his dirk. "Phares beware! This blade is quick to find the way to your life. I have seen Aseneth in an ecstasy of long duration. I will stake my life on the pleasure of again seeing her, and of seeing her on her car of triumph, and of seeing her today. If you know how to take counsel, you will provide a place for me where I shall be secluded from the eyes of Pent-Amen and the multitude, but whence I may be enabled to witness the spectacle and to see the maid of God. Then I will withdraw from the public for a while. I must acquire greater fluency and elegance of speech to fit myself for a high place in the service of the king, for I will dislodge both the butler and the baker of the royal board, and place in their positions myself and Nathan. This will require time and leisure, and I shall depend on you to furnish me with the means of making the most profitable use of my retirement. Make no objections, brother Phares. You know, what I will, that must be done! I will brook no interference, and I will remove everyone who may stand in the way of my rising!"

"The gallows is rising high enough for such as consider a harmless maiden an obstacle to their ambition!"

"You are a fool, Phares, as you have ever been! Neht-nefert was the daughter of P'tehebra!"

"I have heard of the flogging. It is a pity it was not more effective! If you had obeyed the governor, you would not have been punished!"

"I am not a dog that I should patiently bear both the leash and the lash! I am a Hebrew, a free man, a man before God, and not the toy of an ill-humored heathen."

"Mark me, Rahuel: You are not a dog — neither is P'tehebra. You are not a Hebrew. You are not a man. You are not an image, unless sadly soiled, of God. But you are a toy of your own ill-checked humors and passions. You are by halves a Hebrew and a Moabite, and, hence, neither wholly one nor the other, which is equal to being nothing as regards race and blood. Go out from here, I command you, lest you force me to denounce you to the king this day as the murderer of Neht-nefert and as a fomentor of treason!"

Phares had overshot the mark. Eager to rid himself of the hateful visitor, he had abused him beyond the limits of human sufferance. There was a flash of steel, a gasp, and a fall, and Phares was silenced forever. Rahuel stooped over his victim, loosened the priestly cords and put them into his own bosom. Then looking around the chamber and finding the silver censer which the priests used for incense offerings, he also appropriated that vessel, and hastily scratching the seal of the sheiks into one of Phares' cheeks, he wiped his blade on Phares' priestly robes, and departed, a little agitated from resenting the insults flung at him, but outwardly composed and secure. As he went out, he turned the key in the door, withdrew it, and dropped it between the stairs of this and the neighboring dwelling. Then he cautiously proceeded towards another court to interview Nathan.

But Nathan had already left his lodging. The procession was forming in the temple and before the great

gate, where a temporary lodge was erected for the convenience of the king and his attendants. Thither Rahuel directed his steps. The chancellor might provide a place for him somewhere beneath the elevated structure where he might secrete himself and yet watch the pageant. Pent-Amen and Ai-defa were busy about the person of Apepi. They had no time for the present to think of themselves.

Putiphar gladly made accommodations for his tool. Rahuel was bestowed in a comfortable niche formed by two colossal columns against which were placed the steps ascending the balcony of the king's seat. There he was concealed by the outer handrail and hangings of the stairway, but not hindered from surveying the whole length and breadth of the festive street.

Now Rahuel heard in the distance the soft tinkling of the small spherical bells attached to the hem of the robes of the priests when engaged at their functions, as he knew them from past experience. It was a light, ethereal sound, like a prayer from the unpractised lips of children, charming, wooing, and winning devotion. Slowly, also, the floating chords of a hymn, chanted by many distant youthful voices, mingled with the quiet appeal of the bells, rising steadily in volume and clearness. Then the chorus of the priests set in with a gravity and strength that lifted the chant on high and carried it abroad in sturdy melody out of the huge temple and its spacious courts.

Presently the head of the pageant appeared in the festive portals. The banners and streamers fastened to masts and staves high above the roof of the temple on all sides, as if inspired by the wave of song ascending, curled, waved, and rolled in graceful rhythm with the soft breath of the air, a silent homage of applause.

The first to appear in festive array were many lines of young boys clad in white tunics and light blue coats, and bearing blossoms of the blue lotus in their hands. They were followed by a group of priests of the third order, similarly attired, some swinging censers and others sprinkling scented water. After them appeared hundreds of lines of girls ranging in age, as disposed in the order of the march, from about ten to fourteen years, garbed in white coats and red sashes, with capes of red thrown over the left shoulder and drawn together in loose arrangement at the right side a little below the waist. They carried white lotus flowers in their hands and were followed by a group of priests of the second rank, consisting of twelve rows, in each of which twenty-four were marching abreast. They were more richly attired than those who had gone before. Their robes were bordered and hemmed with silver stripes and silver embroidery of the breadth of a hand, their cords about the waist, at the side, and across the breast were twined with silver, and the tassels of the cords and the head-bands of their tiaras were wrought of mixed silver and gold threads on a ground of scarlet byssus.

After this division marched the young men, many hundreds in number, all clad in white tunics and yellow coats, corded and bordered with red. They were bearing large ornamental fans, the many rows alternating with fans of the leaves of the palm and of the papyrus tree. In the center of each fan was fastened a bunch of yellow and blue lotus flowers.

But the center of attraction was the group of maidens who acted as guard of honor to Aseneth. They were preceded by a section of the priests of the supreme caste, numbering three score, and arrayed in splendid

garbs. From the golden tiaras down to the fringe of silver bells and the gold-tipped and embroidered red kid leather boots, they were enveloped in a glitter of sunlight reflected from their brilliant adornment. They too were sprinkling scented water and swinging fragrant censers, but, in moving, were half turned backwards towards the magnificent, towering canopy above the car. The maidens were attired in closely pleated white tunics which reached a little below the knees and were gathered loosely at the waist with a sash of white. Over these garments they wore coats of crimson byssus as resplendent of the sunlight as pure red-gold and of such delicate pleating that they presented a finished, artistic reproduction of the plumage of birds. They were crowned with wreaths of fresh flowers which were set upon the white veils that covered their heads. Their shoes were of white leather, sewed with red thread, and embroidered with figures of birds in yellow and red tints, the eyes of the birds being made of beads of harmonious colors. The tops of their shoes reached well within the breadth of a hand to the hem of their tunics.

These maidens also, bearing gay streamers or small banners in one hand, and strewing flowers and buds with the other in the path of the car, were half-way facing the seat of the idolized prophetess.

The car itself was concealed beneath a tapestry of festoons, garlands, and wreaths of the blue, the crimson, and the white lotus, interlaced with vines and branches of the fig tree and palm branches fantastically twisted and twined, and with small bunches of ears of wheat, and other fresh flowers and foliage. Above the car was erected a canopy of white and yellow byssus decorated with golden imitations of the leaf and the

fruit of the grapevine and bordered with a cord of closely strung little bells of silver. From the four corners and the arched top were streaming manifold long and narrow strips of byssus of mingled red, white, blue, and yellow colors, which were of such length as to trail on the ground beside and behind the car when the wind did not take them aloft and unfold and unfurl them in graceful and cheerful display.

Beneath the canopy was seated the new "goddess," the object of all this exhibition of enthusiasm and splendor. She was garbed exclusively in white, but the feathery-fine pleating of her garments lent her the appearance of a sacred being descended from heights where purity dwells in undisputed sway. Her face still wore the translucent whiteness of alabaster, but the light of rapture and vision had vanished from her eyes. She was still and calm, but sad and soft as from suppressed weeping.

The car was drawn by sixteen sleek, brown heifers yoked four abreast, under the guidance of four young men, each of whom was leading one of the four yokes of the complacent team.

The rear of the procession was brought up by the second section of the priests of highest rank, at whose head marched P'hotepra, the Nutri-Hon, arrayed in the indescribably splendid robes of his exalted office. Instead of bells at the hem of his garments he wore tassels and fringes of pure gold thread, studded with precious stones. His naked arms were encircled both at the wrists and directly forward of the shoulders by bracelets and armlets of artistic design and embellished with glittering and jingling pendants in the form of disks, rings, and diamond-shaped small plates of alternating silver and gold. He was decorated with the

large and heavy neck chain, the mark of the special favor of the pharaoh, and in place of the decorative mantle of the other priests, wore the hieratic tiger-skin, indicative of the singular honor that today he alone was the acknowledged officiating hierophant.

In the rear of the priests followed a troop of warriors numbering many hundreds, the first section of two hundred being mounted on chariots which were drawn by fiery Syrian steeds hitched pair and pair. Between these and the foot troop intervened a band of flute-players and cymbalists and performers on the ram's horn, whose efforts were neither lacking in energy, nor observed without appreciation. The warriors were men of sturdy figure, and so scantily clad that the pronounced ruggedness of their bronzed chests and arms elicited no end of plaudits and compliments from the spectators, after the principal object of their admiration had passed from view.

When the warriors had come abreast of the royal lodge they halted and their music was silenced. The pharaoh descended and mounted his car of state which was drawn out from the side portal of the temple. Taking the reins from the hands of the driver, he quieted his magnificently caparisoned team of six black chargers, and bade the highpriest ascend and stand with him, at his right side, a little to the rear. The chancellor took his position at the left of the king, and Pent-Amen and Ai-defa, together with all the rest of the special attendants of the pharaoh, fell in line in back of the royal carriage, each in his own chariot. The section following immediately upon the car of the king was composed of twelve rows of chariots, each row numbering six of the favored officers. After the pageant was thus completed and enhanced by the

participation of the "Double High House," the flute-players and cymbalists and performers on the ram's horn again struck up a lively air, and the king's train began to move up to the moving throne of the sad and soft maiden perched aloft in solitude amid this large and reverent concourse of worshipers.

By the time that the king joined the procession at the rear, the head of it was already moving into the park at the end of the city. As the children entered, their attention was diverted from their chanting and waving of flowers by the sight of a white and blue banner planted in front of one of the first arbors near the wall. It was the emblem of the "Judge of the Dead,"¹ and signified that death had there overtaken someone unawares, and that the body was not yet removed. The boys were curious to know who it might be that had been murdered; for the body of one dead by accident would have been removed by those who had taken the trouble of placing that banner on the scene of the crime. They began to point out the hallowed and dreaded spot one to another, to whisper and to grow afraid and still, and their droning canticle failed. The priests directed them away from the place, ordered them to resume their singing, and encouraged them by starting the chant themselves. But the nearness of death had chilled the fervor and cheerfulness of the children's breasts. They listlessly dragged along on the way towards their station in the center of the park, not heeding either their instructors or the exigencies of the festive occasion. The young men also were startled, but did not stop.

¹ "*The Judge of the Dead*": Horus, or Hor-em-chu (at a later period Osiris), was in reality only a personification of the divine attributes of justice and mercy combined.

The maidens entered the park — and brought the parade to a standstill. The priests urged them on, coaxed and scolded them; but they refused to pass by the fated spot. Someone among their number had passed around word that Neht-nefert lay dead there in her blood, in the arbor, and the timid maids were thrown into a panic. The one who had published the dreadful news was seen to separate herself from the ranks of her companions and to flee towards the death-hallowed arbor. Others were infected, and fled, but in the opposite direction, until the section of the guard of honor was almost deserted. The heifers at the car were stopped by their leaders so as to keep them from running the ponderous vehicle into the ranks of the priests who were determined to avert the catastrophe of an interruption which would have been tantamount to a sacrilege.. The heifers began to low with the mild surprise of their kind.

This was a bad omen. The heralds of the pharaoh came riding up from behind the car inquiring after the cause of the stop. P'hotepra sprang in dismay from the royal car, and striding up to the priests, noticed that the maidens had deserted their post. His face was white with terror. One of the priests pointed to the placidly flapping blue and white flag, and the venerable Nutri-Hon covered his face with both hands, and returned to the king. "Desecrated by blood!" he cried up at the angry Apepi, pointing out the well-known ensign of Horus to the monarch. In an instant the pageant was in confusion, and in a few minutes it was dissolved, each participant going his own way in the general flight.

P'hotepra was left alone with the car and its serene occupant. He assisted her in descending, and ordering

his own car to be brought to the place, conducted her back to his own house.

Rahuel had been obliged to cover his face and to press close behind the column when both Pent-Amen and Ai-defa passed him on the stairway among the retinue of the king. He did not join the pageant, or mix with the curious spectators along the route. He had slunk into the temple to hide in the shadow of its niches and shrines. There he was most unexpectedly joined by Nathan.

"Zoroith has gone out with the maidens," Nathan cried to Rahuel with utmost resentment. "I forbade her, but she again told me, as she had often told me before, that I was not her master. But I have turned a trick on these cowerds that shall surely serve to sober their heads!"

"What have you done? Will you ruin us?"

"No, it will not work our ruin, but the ruin of the celebration. I have unfurled the banner of Horus at the place where Neht-nefert was murdered."

"What do you know of Neht-nefert?"

"I know that Neht-nefert was the sister of Pent-Amen. Do you desire me to know more?"

"Peace, Nathan! — But listen!"

And then they heard the king's troopers returning, and the wide street re-echoing with the moans and groans of the dispersed procession of Aseneth.





Chapter Thirty-seventh

ADVANCING



NEFER-HOTEP, the redoubtable better half of Putiphar, was mortally offended. In his resolve of witnessing the spectacle of Aseneth's feast, or, rather, of taking a look at the strange girl, the pharaoh had originally not included the intention of making his presence a public function. Hence the ladies of the Court had been separated from the cavaliers to improve as best they might their opportunities of participating in the festivities.

Nefer-hotep thereupon did not participate in anything. She repaired to the wharves, commanding Joseph to accompany her, engaged a bark and two boatmen, and sailed away, down lower into the region of the marshland.¹

Joseph was deeply ashamed of the impropriety of being made the sole companion of the wife of his chief and protector in so foolish an escapade. To add to his confusion, the infatuated, selfish woman did not blush to force importunities upon him which could not but compromise both him and her in the eyes of the twain sailors who did not seem to be of a kind of men ever willing to applaud the errors of the great and

¹ Marshland — Marshmen: Names for the region and for the inhabitants of the Delta, respectively; in common use.

wealthy. They soon became cold, distant, and surly, and made no secret of their disapprobation of the woman's imposing her unreciprocated love-making on the embarrassed youth.

They returned to Anu only on the third morning after the desecrated feast-day. Sailing up the canal before a brisk breeze, they passed a bark which contained a venerable old man and a young girl, besides the sailors.

"Who is that maid?" Nefer-hotep inquired curiously of the boatmen.

"Aseneth," one answered curtly.

"And the old man?"

"Her father."

"Has he a name?" Nefer-hotep snapped back.

"P'hotepra."

Both Joseph and Nefer-hotep knew no more of the story of Aseneth than what could be gathered from public rumors and reports. Joseph did not remember having seen her at home. She had been kept in seclusion and at a distance from the tents of Jacob on account of the enmity of her uncles, the sons of Jacob. And Nefer-hotep was not interested in anything but her schemes to cover up her misconduct before the eyes of the clique at Court, and before the eyes of her confiding liege-lord. The less she heard of things pertaining to religion, the safer she felt in relaxing the bridle of her desires. She cast a second, furtive glance at the modest maid, and then immediately fell to watching Joseph.

The young man would not take his eyes from the girl; a faint remembrance of her must have occurred to him, like a light dream. The barks sailed abreast of each other for a short distance, until Nefer-hotep,

goaded by jealousy and anger, screamingly bade the sailors "heave her to, and give the other vessel the wind!" Then she roundly berated Joseph for "his sinful curiosity; for fixing his languishing eyes on a damsel who was dedicated to the service of the temple; who was the daughter of the archpriest; a morsel," she said contemptuously, "far beyond the reach of a Hebrew whelp!"

Joseph came to with a start of pain. It was a cat's paw, after all, that had been fondling him! He made a brave effort to collect his roving thoughts, and to curb his fired fancy. He put every show of attention in his recovered presence. But there remained an atmosphere of dreaminess and languid fondness about his every move, and even in his every word.

Putiphar had paid no attention to the absence of his wife. The evil incident of the celebration being brought to naught before the face of the pharaoh had furnished him with abundant material for the work of a systematic search and probe into the authorship of the blasphemous trick. Pent-Amen had been informed by Zoroith of the murder of his sister. He had stationed two of the young companions of Neht-nefert and two elderly women mourners in the arbor to watch and to chant the customary prayers for the dead, and to recite the list of the virtues and good graces and good deeds of his beloved sister over her body while her soul was facing the grim judges of the departed. But he had given special direction that meanwhile no other signs, symbols, or ceremonies should be used at the place of the crime. He had covered Rahuel's mark traced on the girl's breast, and had concealed from Putiphar his knowledge of the author of the cowardly misdeed.

The same day, also, the dead body of Phares was

discovered, and the murder reported to Putiphar. In this case the precaution of hiding the badge of the secret assassin had not been taken. The Nutri-Hon noticed it on inspecting the corpse, and wonderingly remarked to those about him that it bore a striking resemblance to the mark on the breast of his daughter Aseneth.¹ "Only the serpent is added here," he explained.

"It is the sign of the devil," Hakar exploded savagely. "The sign of the *Rahu* —"

"What is this you say?" P'hoteptra interrupted him. "The sign of whom?"

"Of the *Rahu*; of the Evil one; of the fool of God!" Hakar answered deliberately.

"I know not why a serpent should typify the *Ra-chu*!"²

"It is not *Ra in the Rising*, good sir. It is the *Avenger* who, by the legend of the East, poured putrid poison over the earth, the handiwork of the good gods. It is the *Author of Sin*, as our ancient books describe him."

At that turn of their speculations, Putiphar, the chancellor, joined them, and immediately took an active and interested part in the discussion. "*Rahu — Rahu*," he recited thoughtfully. "I have a friend whose name is *Rahu — el*!"

"Which means the same: the Evil one, the antagonist of the good," Hakar commented.

"He has styled himself the *Raca-el* —"

"Just as I said: the fool of God!"

"But why should a sane man glory in so weird a title?"

¹ Aseneth passed for the daughter of (Putiphare — Pentephres) P'hoteptra.

² *Ra-chu*: *ch* is here a guttural, pr. *hhu*; *Ra* = God; *chu* = the *Orient*; the *Rising*: *Ra in the Rising*.

"He is a Moabite feeling the disgrace of his disreputable origin and resolved to thwart the designs of God in order to bring to issue his own plotting and scheming. I am speaking for one of his confederates, *Nat-anh*."

Putiphar was mystified. He shook his head with indecision, and gave orders to proceed with the preparations for Phares' burial.

In the evening he called Hakar for a hearing.

"Know you the whereabouts of Rahuel?" he began.

"He is with *Nat-anh*, lodged in a house in the angle of the eastern and the southern walls of the courts."

"*Nat-anh*?" with studious doubt and tardiness.

"A friend of mine — ay, a good friend of mine, although he owes me an accounting for his time and doings these many idle days! With him is Zoroith —!" And then Hakar pulled up his eyebrows and listened.

"The wife of Ai-defa?"

"Ay, the wife of Ai-defa!"

"Lucky accident! The baker is dying from pining after her. It will be worth a hand to him to receive her back!"

"Nevermore! Zoroith is demented."

"A pity for the pretty girl!"

"And a boon at the same time! Ai-defa is not worth the blessing of woman's love! He is not worth having hands to use!"

"Beware, Hakar; beware! He stands before the king!"

"He nearly dashed that woman to death. He will try his strength some day in an attack on the king. He is a traitor!"

"Hakar!" Putiphar shouted, and sprang from his seat.

"Ai-defa is a designing traitor!"

"And have you come down from Thebes in the disloyal South to tell this news to me?"

"It is in the *disloyal South* that traitors are raised and cultivated like wheat!"

Putiphar was dumbfounded. Here was a man from the South, the center of all unrest and trouble; a man whose integrity was attested by the governor of Thebes in his credential letters; a man who ranked among the hereditary independent princes of the old order. And this man accuses a royal officer of the palace of treason!

Hakar unwound his belt, and produced the tablet which contained Ai-defa's appointment as local chief of the Leaguers. Putiphar read it over many times.

"Who is the 'brother' mentioned here at the bottom? 'Encourage your brother,' it reads; and here again in the seal of the *Rahu*! Man, what manner of game is this that this *Rahu* is playing in the dark?"

"My Lord the Chancellor, you ask two questions at once, each of which it is of utmost importance to answer separately and independently of the other. That 'brother' of Ai-defa is Pent-Amen. But as you see, he needs to be encouraged. He is not in sympathy with Ai-defa's labors for the League. He should be removed from the influence of the baker. He should be promoted to a post in the military. He is prudent and firm. So much for an answer to the first question.

"As to the second: That *Rahu* is Rahuel, your friend. He has discovered Ai-defa's disloyalty through this mark which *Nat-anh* attached to the document after it was despatched to the baker, in order to identify it in case of need. A prudent move, Lord Chancellor, as is proved by this event! What manner of game

Rahuel may be playing for his own private ends, I do not know; but he has nursed a huge grudge against Ai-defa, and that grudge has borne fruit for our meat. That he has an ulterior motive, is not to be dissembled. But I care not what it may be. Yet I will predict that a man of his temper spins his rope so long that ultimately he will himself be hanged with it. This is why I pronounced his name to be a prophetic name. He may realize as much himself, for he is taking desperate chances, and has called himself in derision of his foolhardiness, the *Raca-el*, the 'fool of God.'

"But aside from the dark designs of the *Rahu* — which is a whole band of secret assassins, as you say — who killed Neht-nefert? The pharaoh insists upon knowing it! And who posted the flag of Horus at the arbor? And who killed Phares? The pharaoh is afraid of secret daggers that are so bold as to select their victims at leisure and to strike down even the innocent and the sacred."

"Both the maiden and the priest are marked with the seal of the sheiks!" Hakar suggested significantly.

"Is Rahuel the assassin?"

"Rahuel, or one of his band! But, be kind enough to mark that Zoroith also is initiated in the secrets of the *Rahu*; that she is demented, and that she cultivates the illusion of being still a maiden although being a mother!"

"An old illusion, as you well know, which has engendered in the long run of centuries nothing worse than the license of the vile and dark mysteries of Ashteroth. The daughters of the Arabs and of the Midianites across the sea are in the habit of wearing pendant figures of Ashteroth at their throats for amulets. But Ashteroth is not a gory goddess."

But Hakar was bent upon destroying the woman "picked up from the gutter," who was mainly responsible for Ai-defa's failure as an accomplice of the conspirators. Hence he would not have Putiphar brush aside the insinuation of her guilt with a superficial reference to the mythology of the Asiatics.

"Be pleased, Lord Chancellor, to note," he continued, determined to press his charge, "that Zoroith is of low extraction —"

"She is the daughter of a sheik!"

"What is a sheik in Kemet? ¹ And was she not found in the company of potters and other street-venders under the wheels of Pent-Amen's chariot? Courting the society of the low is a voluntary degradation as disreputable as low birth! She was last seen in the company of Neht-nefert. I have twenty maids ready to swear to it! It was Zoroith, my Lord the Chancellor, who advised us of the murder of the girl! We hastened to the arbor, and found the body still warm and flexible, and the blood liquid and red!"

"Does Zoroith go about armed with a dirk?"

"She does bear a dirk in her cincture! And who would so easily find access to the chamber of a priest on such an occasion as these festive days, on the morning of the great parade, but one intimately acquainted with both the localities and the personages dedicated to the service of the local deity?"

"But what purpose could Zoroith have had in plundering? The censer of Phares has been abstracted, and his priestly cords are torn from his shoulders and hips, and are nowhere to be found!"

"Both censer and cinctures are found in Zoroith's chamber in the dwelling of *Nat-anh*!"

¹ Kemet: Egypt.

"Hakar! How can a frail woman be such a blood-thirsty tigress! Call Zoroith to me!"

When Hakar had left him, Putiphar remained fixed at the spot where he stood, a much disturbed man. Of course, terrible as it would be, if Zoroith was found guilty of either of the two most atrocious murders, or of both, as the indications warranted it to presume, she would have to be executed on the block, and her body would have to be dismembered and cast to the jackals and hyenas of the fields. It was a saving grace of the horrible proceeding that, although she was a woman, she was not a native.

Zoroith was ushered into the presence of the stern examiner, pale and pensive, but calm and firm. Her clear, bright eyes, large and limpid, fascinated Putiphar from the start with their shimmering of innocence and sadness. Hakar had not come with her.

"Unbind your cincture!" Putiphar addressed her, not more unkindly than he could force himself to speak in the presence of so complete a picture of suppressed suffering. But Zoroith snapped her teeth together, grasped her cincture with both hands at the knot, and drew it tighter.

"Have you a dirk concealed in your cincture?"

She answered with a silent nod of the head.

"For what purpose do you carry so dangerous a weapon?"

"Ai-defa!" she lisped faintly.

"Do you know Neht-nefert?"

A slight bow of the head from her as an answer.

"She was killed?"

A tear dropped on the floor from the woman's eyes.

"Do you know Phares, the Hebrew?"

"Ay, sir!" almost inaudibly.

"Who killed him?"

"The *Rahu!*" she breathed.

"Do you know Rahuel?"

A slight shake of the head.

"But he is quartered with you!"

Neither answer nor motion.

"Now, woman," Putiphar growled with assumed severity, "I will have none of this game of hide and seek! Speak, or I shall have you racked, drawn, and quartered!"

Zoroith quaked and reeled for an instant; but she remained silent.

Putiphar advanced towards her, and lightly laid his hands on her shoulders. He saw that her right hand was plunged into her cincture feeling for the hilt of the knife. But he wore a coat of leather covered with small scales of bronze beneath his tunic, and could thus take the risk of a thrust from a woman's hand. Would she strike at him, she would convict herself of the charge of murder lodged against her.

But she did not strike. She raised her eyes with earnest and intense pleading and breathed to him laboriously: "Do not touch me. I cannot bear the touch of a man!"

Now Putiphar understood. But a woman so faithful to her marriage vows was neither demented nor bloodthirsty. He withdrew reverently, moved to the core with overflowing and tender sympathy.

"Go your way, Zoroith," he said gently. "And may you soon see the day of your return to your child and to Ai-defa's hearth-stones!"

She thanked him with a long and reminiscent look of her tear-brimmed eyes, and moved out, less calm and firm than she had been at her entrance.

Putiphar summoned Rahuel. He had much desired not to come in contact with his agent in public, so as not to discredit him with the craft over whom he had set him as his spy. But the orders of the pharaoh were peremptory. These tragedies must be cleared up, and Putiphar was charged with the uncongenial task of doing the clearing-up.

Rahuel's towering seven feet of height had never impressed the chancellor so favorably as now when he strode in through the curtained vestibule of the chamber, pushing the curtains apart with both hands, and stooping a little so as to simulate avoiding unpleasant contact with the lofty architrave of the entrance.

"You must follow me before the face of the king," Putiphar began abruptly, knowing, as he did, that he was dealing with a man as daring as he was astute, and wishing to throw his array of arguments into confusion before he should have time to adapt them to the demands of the new turn of things. Rahuel had surely learnt from Hakar, and perhaps also from Zoroith, the object of these proceedings, and would be ready with a thousand reasons to prove that he was innocent, if his innocence should be questioned.

He received Putiphar's announcement with a smile which disclosed the whole assemblage of passions, wickedness, and general deviltry housed in his bosom. His mouth opened, his eyelids descended half way, the muscles of his face were drawn together in bundles over the cheekbones, the tip of his nose was straightened and sharpened, and the nostrils were dilated with the outward reflexion of the mental act of scenting and groping. He presented the appearance of a tiger's head cut off at the moment of intensest bloody revel, and mounted in all its hideousness on a nondescript

dummy. It was his face only that was alive; the rest of his body was stark and stiff. He could not answer from delight.

Putiphar felt a cold shiver creeping through his veins into his innermost heart. This man was guilty, or might be guilty, of any crime within the range of the daring of either man or demon. He was surely the murderer of both the maiden and the priest. This conviction confirmed Putiphar in his purpose of presenting him to the king in person. A valuable tool would perhaps be lost; but a tool of double edge and passing fine temper. Rahuel was either molded for a sovereign position above men and kings, or he was turned so smooth that he was nowhere to fit and fasten in position.

"The king is angry," Putiphar resumed. "He will find and punish the desecrator of the feast day. You must come with me!"

"Why must I, before the rest?" Rahuel inquired with well-feigned reserve and submission.

"You have committed the murder of Neht-nefert and of Phares, and have planted the banner of Horus in the way of the festive celebration!"

"But I have not, my Lord the Right Leg of the Double High House! I have seen Aseneth, and I have wondered with the most excellent Nutri-Hon at the heavenly grace of the maiden. At the time that these deeds must have been done, I was found to be the guest of P'hotepra, as P'hotepra can and will assure you or the king."

"Then you know nothing of these several crimes? I had not thought that you were so far removed from the haunts of criminals and so blind to their ways! I have had occasion several times to commend you for

your shrewdness and vigilance! But let it be so. Come with me to the hall of the king!"

And Rahuel went to the king.

Apepi received his faithful chancellor and Rahuel together. He was not in royal mood, but fretful and uneasy.

"Who is this foreigner," he asked tartly of Putiphar, "that he should be made worthy of the grace of standing before my face?"

The question was a mere formality, and was treated as such by both visitors. Putiphar prostrated himself before the royal throne in protestation of his own unworthiness, and gave a tug or two at Rahuel's coat to persuade him to do likewise. But the "foreigner" was not to Rahuel's taste, and he remained standing.

The attendants behind the throne, the armed body-guard of the king, showed an inclination to rush at him and throw him down. But he never winced, keeping his gaze fixed on the king's face.

"The most illustrious sovereign of free men will not require a free-born foreigner to lie in the dust before him," he said, without a trace of either arrogance or fear in his voice and manner. But he was ignored for the present. Putiphar being bidden to arise, made report of his findings to which Rahuel listened with quiet interest. He never flinched; not even at the elaborate description which Putiphar made of the brutal murders. His cheeks assumed some color when Zoroith was described as having been found "in the gutter, in the company of potters and other disreputable folk who shun the light of day." He shot a glance of disapproval at the eloquent narrator; but it was not clear whether he disapproved of the unmerited dishonor done to Zoroith and himself, or of the zeal of

Putiphar in adding epithets and qualifications not warranted by the facts as he himself best knew them. He was preparing for an opportunity to administer a mild castigation to the spouting chancellor.

And presently the opportunity came to hand.

Apepi asked him curtly through one of his courtiers: "Whence are you?"

Rahuel bowed with exquisite grace and dignity, and replied slowly and emphatically: "I am Rahuel, one of the princes from the tents of Hek-Jakub in Chanaan."

"Your mission?"

"To Anu, with Aseneth."

"Your papers?"

"Countersigned by Hent-ha-nur, the governor of the Southern Gate, and by — " he faltered and stammered — "the illustrious Lord of the North, P'tehebra the Stern."

Apepi did not like the "Lord of the North," as no king likes comparisons between himself and his subjects. But he continued: "Your office?"

"Scribe, and disciplinarian at the Per-anh of Memphis, by the grace of His Honor the brave Right Leg of my Lord the Pharaoh!"

"Services?"

"Have reformed the manners of the students, and have restrained them from joining the Leaguers of the South."

"Do you know Neht-nefert?"

"She is dead!"

"And Phares?"

"Dead, too!"

"Do you know them?" the king insisted.

"Phares was my brother, and Neht-nefert the sister of Pent-Amen."

"Who killed them?"

"The *Rahu*."

"How do you know?"

"By his mark, the badge of Ashteroth."

"How do you know his mark?"

"From Zoroith."

"Go ahead!"

"Zoroith was once my ward, after I had been the guest of Eophres, her father. She breathed this mark over the dish of brotherhood which the sheik had prepared for me and my way-worn brethren. Later I rescued her from the water, and asked her to explain the ceremony to me. All the Arab sheiks know the mark, and there are some present in the city today. It was I in whose company Zoroith was found when she was run down by Pent-Amen's wedding car. The rest of the *disreputable folk* who were present at the accident were as little known to her as to me!"

Rahuel was immovably calm. But Apepi caught the pass at Putiphar, and acknowledged it with a nod of recognition and humorous approval at the nettled chancellor.

"What motive might an Arab sheik have," the king went on in a lighter vein, "in killing the maid and the Hebrew guest of the priests?"

Here was a loophole in the uncomfortable net.

"His motive might be revenge," Rahuel replied lightly. "Neht-nefert, they tell us, offended a stranger in the morning at the dock; she acted the part of Aseneth with her light-hearted friends in the park the evening before: all of which is the report of Zoroith and a score of other women who witnessed her presumption. And Phares was a Hebrew, the son of a tribe kindred to the children of Abraham and Ketura.

He should never have assumed the priestly cords and censer in Kemet. They are a jealous tribe, the men across the sea!"

"Plausible!" the king exclaimed clapping his hands. Putiphar and the other attendants of the throne also said: "Plausible," and also clapped their hands.

"Arrest all the Arabs in the city!" the king commanded his "Right Leg," and arose to signify that the hearing was ended.

"Excepting Zoroith!" Rahuel pleaded.

"Excepting Zoroith, the ward of Rahuel!" the king responded, and stepped down from his throne and advanced towards Rahuel.

"Thus shall he be honored whom the king wishes to honor," he said to Rahuel, while stripping a ring from his finger and putting it on Rahuel's finger. It was the signet ring of Apepi.

Rahuel had taken a decided step in his advance towards the goal of his ambition. Now he was the equal of Putiphar, and also of the "illustrious" P'teheb, in the sight of the king. If he could only now obtain an office, he would be mounted so firmly that none but the king could dislodge him.

On the way out, Putiphar complimented him on his rare good fortune. But remembering that he himself had drawn Rahuel from the dark, he was bound to urge his claim to gratitude, and to curb the pride of his protégé.

"It is only heroes or fools who tumble into the lap of good luck," he said.

"Ay," Rahuel replied. "They alone are not smothered in the lap of so generous a mother!"



Chapter Thirty-eighth

THE NEW MER-SENUTI

THE beautiful and retiring Binyah had taken part both in the journey to Anu and in the festivities with the zest which only a tranquil soul can supply. She had watched and observed with equal interest and regret the manners of men and women intent upon pushing themselves into the first places near the king, or, at least, upon pushing ahead of their equals and competitors. She had noted the absence of peace and contentment and hearty good-fellowship, which figured as the three graces of love in her own home, no less than in her own bosom, and she had wondered how these people contrived to put on exhibition in public so large a face of happiness, and how they actually could be merry and sociable.

It impressed her much as the happiness of caged song-birds, the merriment of a strain trilled out over a graveyard, the sociability of prisoners united in bondage by clanking chains. It was the light of the sun laughingly roving over the scanty and scattered tufts sprouting from a deep morass. These hearts were closed and sealed. The choicest drops of happiness reposing in the depths of every honest heart, here were never drawn to anoint with their enchanting fragrance the wounds and bruises incident to the warfare of life here

below, and thus to make private life a sweet secret, and public life a pleasant rivalry of friends.

Binyah had also watched Aseneth, that enthroned picture of regretful beauty and peace. Her womanly heart went out to the maiden so well favored, so much applauded and coveted, and yet so deeply still that, had she been made to speak, the word unsealing her lips would likewise have unsealed her swelling heart and the brimming wells of her tears. The divine is too difficult to act for man. The majesty of heaven may sit well upon the pure and the devout as a halo, as the breath of God; but the crown of divinity crushes the brow of mortals.

After the feast, Binyah went about seeking Zoroith, and found her in the evening in the park, as soon as she had returned from the hearing before Putiphar. Zoroith had gone out alone, had stolen away from her captor Nathan, in order to spend an hour in mental converse with the dead Neht-nefert; for there is communion between kindred souls even across the boundary of the Stygian realms. Neht-nefert had passed beyond the strifes and disputes of the heart. She was dead and happy. Zoroith also was dead; but was yet forced to bear the conflict going on within her, and she was not happy.

The body of the slain girl had been removed, and the banner of Horus had been furled. Zoroith wandered about the park wrapped in thought and racked by agonies in turn. She was alone in the world with her burden of suffering, a love as strong as the rock ribs of her native hills, and as sensitive as the petals of a lily, hurt, bruised, broken, dashed to pieces without hope of mending.

Ai-defa had made several half-hearted advances

towards her; half-hearted, not because he was not ready to surrender his whole old self to her, but because he dreaded that his love would not be accepted. She had ignored him and his pleadings. She had looked up over his head while he was protesting his desire to receive her back. She had looked down at the spot where his feet were planted while he was tugging at her heartstrings with an appeal to her motherly affections. But when he opened his arms to embrace her, she had declined, turned from him, and departed in sad silence.

Binyah found her seated on the steps of a pavilion erected over a deep well. It was a dangerous place for one so deeply craving oblivion with the siren voice of lurking death so near. Binyah hurried her steps beyond the measure of grace dictated by her comeliness, once she had caught sight of her. There were many other idlers in the park, but Zoroith was alone.

When Binyah accosted her with a gentle, low greeting and a warm embrace, she started from her ramblings with a short cry of fright, but recognized her friend, and passively submitted to her caresses.

"Return to *him*," she whispered into her ears. "Return to his hearthstones — for the love of your child!"

But there was no response, save a quicker and stronger throbbing and heaving of the bosom which Binyah held clasped to her own breast.

"He sees the wickedness of his mistrust and the cruelty of his assault upon your life. He sees it and rues it," she continued earnestly. "He loves you better now than when he made you the mistress of his house! He will exalt you to be the mistress of his fortune!"

A slight tremor, like that in the veins of a lamb stretched out for the slaughterer's knife, thrilled through Zoroith's body in response to the touch upon her heart. Binyah compassionately encircled the sweat-dampened head of her friend with both her warm hands and pressed her cheek against those cold, half-open lips for a kiss of recognition, of returning sense and sensation; but those lips remained cold, and would not close.

"Zoroith!" she cried, hushing her voice with the intensity of her anguish. "You do wrongly torture yourself! Go back to where a good fortune and the design of high Heaven have placed you, to rejoice or to suffer until your measure shall be filled, and your heart shall have been weighed!"¹

Zoroith roused herself a little from her apparent stupor, and raised her eyes to Binyah. "Would *you?*" she lisped laboriously. Now Binyah made no answer. This woman's heart was broken. How deeply she must have loved to suffer so cruelly from the breaking of her love.

Zoroith waited a while for an answer. Then she arose, clasped Binyah in a passionate embrace and imprinted a burning kiss upon her lips, and with a sigh — departed.

Neht-nefert's body was undergoing the customary process of preparation for burial. Under the supervision of her brother her heart and intestines were removed and placed in funeral urns to be deposited in her tomb beside the sarcophagus. The body was cleansed and washed with scented waters, and then inclosed in a cask filled with niter, there to repose for

¹ The "*weighing of the heart*" was the principal ceremony in the judgment of the dead; the selection for eternal life with God.

seventy days. On the eighth day, when P'tehebra had been summoned from his distant post at the Northern Wall to pay his last respects to his ill-starred daughter, Pent-Amen obtained leave of the pharaoh to accompany the funeral party to the ancient burial-place of his house in the sacred cemeteries of the great temple of Ammon at Thebes.

Ai-defa also had petitioned for a temporary relief from office in order to honor and console his friend and colleague by participating in the lengthy and elaborate ceremonial of the funeral. But he had petitioned in vain, until upon Rahuel's advice the chancellor had persuaded the pharaoh to "let the twain falcons fly together." At Thebes they could be watched by Rahuel, or by Nathan, and should they implicate themselves with the intrigues of the League, the rope could be held ready for the twain together on their return.

At the last moment, therefore, Ai-defa also was favored with a notice from the "Double High House" that his petition for a leave of absence was graciously granted "in view of the close union of hands and hearts existing between the twain ministers of the royal board which made their separate lives one life, and brought them close together in joy and in sorrow."

The richly appointed funeral bark then left port immediately. Rahuel had sedulously kept out of sight of P'tehebra as long as the severe governor, now a bereaved and stricken father, had been on land. But when the stately vessel departed, he went down close to the bank of the canal to take a glimpse at the craft which it might be well for him to recognize later at a glance and in the distance. He took note of the bent and haggard father of his victim, of the reserved and

sullen Ai-defa, and of the dejected Pent-Amen, whom he saw nailing to the stern of the boat, directly beneath the fluttering white and blue streamers of the banner of Horus, a circular tablet of about a foot in diameter. On this tablet, the ground of which was white, was traced in deep purple lines the mark of the *Rahu* with a cancelation mark in blue diagonally across the width of its face.

Rahuel's lips curled with disdain, and his nostrils were dilated with wrath. He reclined against a post, settling down in a position of observation, and with unfriendly gaze followed the bark as far as it could be seen. Then he turned away, more determined than ever to "hound the victims of his revenge to the nether world, even if he himself were forced to go down with them," as he delivered himself of his resolve. But finding Nathan standing at his elbow, he discarded the unpleasant memory of the banner of Horus planted as a warning above his own badge, and sarcastically inquired of his crafty confederate whether he had found Zoroith.

"I have not," Nathan answered with considerable irritation. "The foolish girl is deaf to my suit. I had rather finish her before we leave the city. She should make a dangerous witness against us in the Gate!"

"I think not," Rahuel replied. "Would she injure us, she could before this have sought the favor of Putiphar, or of Pent-Amen, or could even have returned to the house of the baker. The wound that Ai-defa has opened in her heart is so deep and hungry that it is devouring all her thought, and, I fear me, will devour her mind. She still jealously loves the baker. Her heart is with him; but she refuses to feed her love, because she has found him unworthy of love. Brother,

Zoroith is a noble woman! She stifles the cry of her heart in order not to be obliged to lower her self-respect!"

"Then you would not have me remove her?"

"Not unless you wish to be removed with her!"

"What is it you say?"

"It is said!"

"Have you any designs on her?"

"No!" — decidedly, but protestingly.

"Why should you wish to see her live when she is a constant menace to our safety, and slights the advances of an honorable man?"

"Yours, you mean? You are not an honorable man, Nathan — at least, your advances are not honorable. She is vowed to another man's couch!"

"But I loved her long before this unworthy brute took her unto himself!"

"You should have married her then!"

"She went away with you and left me hungering after her. I have come down from Thebes in order to renew my suit with her!"

"Go back to Thebes, brother Nathan, and the sooner you put her out of your mind, the better it will be for you and us all. A lover is a poor partner at a game!"

"I cannot live without her, Rahuel!"

"But you must! You will make an enemy of me if you insist on winning her from her loyalty! Her sorrow deserves respect, and shall command my arm for her protection!"

"Rahuel, you are assuming a moral garb — is it not rather late for you to shed your feathers? A bird of prey, born to the game of bloodshed, you would turn to be a modest, simpering finch! Avast, Rahuel! I shall follow my own instincts!"

"Do so, my son! Zoroith has departed with the bark of Neht-nefert. She will be among the mourners at Thebes!"

"You knew it, and did not apprise me of her impending escape?"

"Her departure is no escape. She had nothing to hold her here, as you have no legitimate claims on her!"

"But is not Ai-defa also a passenger on that bark of P'tehebra?"

"He will board his own bark at Memphis, and follow them thence to the burial-ground."

"Cannot we secure a fast boat and give them chase?"

"Thebes is not beyond the boundary of the earth, and the ceremonies of the burial are long and elaborate, and P'tehebra will remain thirty days after the interment to offer daily the prescribed sacrifices for the purging of her soul. Do not act in haste. Take counsel, Nathan. We are on the high road to victory!"

Nathan was not much inclined to practise patience in a matter he had had so long at heart. But he knew Rahuel's ways too well not to submit to his directions. When Rahuel should reach his goal, he might deign to lend his assistance also to the accomplishment of Nathan's designs.

That same day Putiphar delivered to Rahuel the royal commission of *Mer-Senuti*¹ of that portion of Thebes which was not tributary to the temple. It was an empty charge at the time for the reason that not even the local governor himself could gain control of the cereal products of his province, which was the country of the enemy. All the grain available was stored in the granaries of the temple and its large

¹ *Steward of the Granaries.*

territory as a future common resource during the impending revolution. But by this appointment Rahuel was made an officer of the government and was empowered to use the seal which the king had so graciously bestowed on him.


It was a happy day for Rahuel. He saw himself lifted on high, and before him, spreading wide, a field of more effective operation. Now the fate of Pent-Amen was given into his hands, and with it, the fate of the stern P'tehebra who one day had dared to wield the scourge on Rahuel's back!





Chapter Thirty-ninth

FLYING

NE morning, shortly after the departure of P'tehebra's bark, the pharaoh directed Putiphar to make the necessary arrangements for an extended hunting excursion down the river, into the wilds on the eastern borders of the Sethroitic province. That part of the country swarmed with lions and leopards and other royal game, and the king could right heartily enjoy the dangerous sport of contesting for his life with a ferocious brute at the distance of the length of a lance. But Putiphar was bidden to return to the capital, and to resume his duties as chancellor and as captain of the city guards; and he was startled a little.

Meanwhile the king had had Aseneth presented before him in the temple. He had curiously questioned her about her origin, her wonderful gifts of vision and rapture, and about the mark on her breast. Her ingenuous answers had elicited his admiration, but had justified his personal view, that she was indeed a special favorite of Heaven, endowed with extraordinary powers, but yet a child of man with no superstitious pretensions of being exalted above the other children of men. Her nocturnal converse with angels, he doubted. P'hotepra had spoken of it to him, and had vouched for the truth of his narrative with an oath by the *Choper*

t'esef.¹ She herself asserted them with the same simplicity and security that marked all her assertions.

But the pharaoh found within his own religious conscience no reason why God should not directly communicate with an instrument of His wisdom and goodness so plainly selected for a definite purpose. The form according to which the Deity was worshiped by the enlightened in Egypt excluded mediating ministers between God and man, and pointed an uncertain finger merely at a mystic figure of a mediator which might represent either the person of the monarch, or a Deliverer and Mediator to descend from the throne of God; hence, probably God Himself — as was rendered plausible by the ancient cult of Horus, who was conceived to be God, and at the same time, the Son of God.

At all events, Apepi was much rejoiced at the purity and piety of the beautiful maid, whom he dowered with splendid gifts of fine garments and gold, and whom he earnestly recommended to the venerable Nutri-Hon as to a father.

As a special mark of his royal favor, he graced her name with the rare title of Nutri-Hont,² and under his own seal issued letters patent to insure for her this dignity for life.

After this event, the king left the city with his train of courtiers and captains to repair to the wilderness for a few weeks of the engaging game of the chase, and Putiphar returned to Memphis.

Hakar and Rahuel were among the company which sailed with the chancellor. Nathan had disappeared a few days before, after he had held a secret conference

¹ Literally: "*The Cause of Himself*"; the name of God; the equivalent in Egypt of the *Jahveh* of Israel: of frequent occurrence.

² Archpriestess, or Archprophetess.

with his chief. Joseph, the steward of the chancellor, made the acquaintance of Rahuel on the way. But although they readily established their identity to the satisfaction of each other, there was no cordial note in their exchange of experiences and in their rehearsing of the memories of their common home. Joseph was reserved. He seemed uneasy in Rahuel's presence. He refused to respond to any of Rahuel's hints at the unpleasant conditions in Putiphar's splendid mansion. At last he turned his back upon his impertinent countryman, and avoided contact with him altogether. "An impudent cub," Rahuel snorted, and let the youth alone for the rest of the journey.

At home Rahuel was adopted among the scribes or notaries serving the king under Putiphar's direction, some in the department of the city police, and others in that of the royal grain houses. The latter department was only lately taken over by the busy chancellor on the strength of Hakar's revelations, out of the administration of Ai-defa, the suspected chief baker and steward of the loaves to the pharaoh.

Rahuel was displeased at being assigned to the office of bookkeeper in the bakery. It was so peaceful and comfortable a position that he feared moss might grow on his heels. He would rather have nosed about among the barracks of the doughty city guards and the body-guard of the king, the most independent of the king's servants, who had access to all information concerning the exact positions of the troops stationed in the various provinces by the tens of thousands, and their exact numbers, equipment, and provisions. Such knowledge could have been turned to profit, as it was daily becoming more evident that the unruly South was preparing to shake off the yoke of the Hyksos. It would be

easier to gather a fortune in time of war in one month, than in time of peace in ten years.

When Rahuel had come to understand from the advices lately received at the palace from Thebes that war was inevitable, and when he learned that the pharaoh's hunting expedition was only a blind to cover his tour of the garrisons of the North, thus justifying the uneasiness and suspicions of the chancellor, he abandoned his ambition of gaining a higher position in the service of the government, and resolved to feather his nest for a future cold day. He would keep in sight his main object, the destruction of P'tehebra; but he would provide that this aim should not interfere with his acquisition of wealth. He would seize the first opportunity to force himself upon the attention of Putiphar for a place among the military.

When the rupture between the North and the South should occur, as occur it must, and temporary confusion and anarchy would ensue, it was one standing closest to the coffers of the losing party that could loot and plunder with immunity to his heart's content. And perhaps he himself could find a way to contribute a little towards determining who should be the losing party. P'tehebra, although a member of the ancient nobility, would undoubtedly remain loyal to his king; hence, the losing party must be the party of the Hyksos usurpers, and P'tehebra must be made the instrument of the defeat against his own inclination and design. It might take a year, or a few years, to obtain a strong hold on the reins of the administration, as every step must be taken under cover. But the game was well worth the candle, and the reward for such heroic patience and vigilance would flow into his coffers in a thousand golden streams.

Such were the prospects that gilded Rahuel's days of the unpalatable dignity of *Mer-Senuti* with the *Mer*¹ engraved on his seal, and the *Senuti*² holding off at a great distance. He would labor and plan day and night to add to his seal the title of *Mer-Medaiu*,³ and thus draw nigh to the actual chiefs of the warriors, to the great *Aper-bar*,⁴ the doughty chieftain of the Beduins of the desert, and, above all, to P'tehebra, the general of several important districts of the extreme North.

Nathan had revealed to him that in the temple of Thebes, the wealthiest sanctuary in the land, were concealed under guard hundreds of stone caskets and bronze-bound wooden chests filled to the lid with gold and silver rings and tiles, the hoard of the rebels, and with the treasures of the temple which had been lavished upon the house of Ammon like a golden rain of royal favors for centuries.

The wealth of Thebes was incalculable. The temple alone was a storehouse of the gilt-edged abundance of the harvests of many years, of the practical piety of many dynasties, and of the gold-gleaming fruits of the zeal and thrift of several generations of patriots, plotting, toiling, and suffering for the liberation of their country. If only a tiny streamlet of this sea of wealth can be diverted to the caverns of the Arabian range between the Nile and the Red Sea, of which Nathan had painted so attractive a picture, Rahuel and his band would in time return to the land of *Kinahhi*⁵ with the pomp and splendor of the kings of Damascus and Charchemish.⁶

¹ *Mer*: Chief, or Overseer.

² The granaries.

³ Chief of Soldiers; Captain, or Commander.

⁴ Probably: *Aper-Baal*, i.e., Ephraim, of Baal (Ephraim, son of Midian).

⁵ Chanaan.

⁶ Syria; the great Hittite nation was then beginning to rise.

Events seemed ready to shape to Rahuel's plans. There occurred one day a disturbance in Putiphar's house. Disturbances always throw an opportunity in the way of a shrewd man. Putiphar, absorbed in the discharge of his manifold official duties, could to better advantage brook a rebellion in the kingdom than a disturbance in his home. He was trained to official life, but was woefully inexperienced in domesticity. In his office he was at home, but in his home he was at sea. Rahuel, cognizant of the weaknesses of his chief, glowed with inward pleasure at the report of the untidy things making the round of the many unkind mouths throughout the palace and the palace courts.

One day, in the cheery, charming, and genial hours of the forenoon, the mansion resounded with the cries of Nefer-hotep, the complaisant mistress. Contrary to her usual modes and moods she was running about the house, screaming and crying about "the man who had shown impudence to her," and, as proof of her doleful tale, she was flirting a man's coat in the faces of her servants. "There now," she screamed, "he has brought in this *Ebri* to abuse us! What is there of the safety of a woman in her own house! Her servants make bold to stand in the place of her lord!"

The *Ebri* and servant was none but Joseph, the chief steward of the chancellor. According to her version of the incident about which she was declaiming, she had torn the mantle from the shoulder of the servant in defense of her matronly virtue and honor, and he had fled at her indignant repulse.

Putiphar was just stepping into the court of his house as the shame-faced youth was brought in from his flight into the garden. The disturbed chancellor at once suspected that the plight of his trusted steward

was in some manner connected with the noise resounding in the house, and, therefore, ordered Joseph to be bound and to be put in custody. Then he retired with Nefer-hotep into her own private apartments and urged her to tell and retell the story of her misfortune many times.

He listened attentively to every detail of the description of Joseph's insinuations, advances, and importunities, of his disappointment and discomfiture at her steadfastness, of his confusion and flight which had left his coat in her hands. But the oftener she told the tale, the more smoothly it glided from her tongue, and the more keenly she appeared to relish her own eloquence. Putiphar had often applied the same trick to slanderers, and had caught many perfecting their tale and embellishing their story as they became more familiar with it by repetition, when it would have been more natural for them to drop insignificant details on repetition in order to present in clearer outline their main contention. It was an old device of the chief of the city's police for the hanging of men by their own rope when the authorities were at a loss to find a rope by which to hang them.

When Nefer-hotep's interest in relating her adventure with the Hebrew servant had ebbed away with the frequent telling, and her apparent resentment had subsided into a satisfied smile, Putiphar thoughtfully shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, dear," he said, beginning his cross examination, "it was this way: He seized you, and you turned away and fled in terror?"

"Ay, ay! He seized me," she averred impressively, "at the arms, at the throat, and at the shoulders! But I tore myself from his clutches and fled!"

"Nefer-hotep, my dear lamb! Joseph should have had three pair of arms to hold you in so many places at once! A little more consistently, dear, pray! And how could you draw the coat from his shoulders if he was running after you? You must have had extraordinary presence of mind to think of his coat at that moment of extreme peril to your honor!"

Nefer-hotep perceived the sarcasm of her husband's speech as plainly as she could smell a stream of sulphurous fume among a cloud of incense, and she instantly reacted on the insinuation of untruthfulness, relinquishing her coveted reserve and baring before the eyes of her neglectful lord the sting that had long been rankling in her breast.

"Do you think," she cried petulantly, "that you men alone are gifted with coolness in the hour of danger? Have I not had my eyes open? Had he not many times before this day lain in ambush for my virtue? If you had shown a little solicitude about the welfare of your wife, you would not now be brought to have this disgrace flung into your face! But you have neither thought nor care for anything but your office and your king! Your wife may die from solitude and shame, or fall into the hands of your slaves, before your eyes will be opened to your domestic duties!"

"Peace, my love! If the Hebrew has done wrong, I will lay his head at your feet. But his coat in your hands is like a shoe that fits both feet. I could sooner be made to see that a man's coat can be torn from his shoulder when he flees, than that a woman should fly from a man, and in her flight reach back and take the coat. Child, to strip a bad man of his coat while in pursuit of his game is a feat of which I had not thought

you capable! It would involve the risk of your cause before the Gate, would you insist upon this feature of the event. The priests and the captains and the scribes allow none to blindfold them. The crime of adultery committed by a servant is subject to the death penalty. But our judges are loath to pronounce the sentence of death unless the guilt of the accused is proved beyond a shadow of doubt. Man has only one life to lose. Take heed, my dove, that they may not at least snip off your nose when they hang Joseph! Put this garment aside — and take a little more interest in your own need of presentable habiliments!”

The last remark was made with cool deliberation, because of its timeliness and fitness. But Nefer-hotep was so exasperated at the matter-of-fact method of her genial husband that she flung the coat in his face, screaming:

“Take it, and hang it over your Hebrew, and cover his sin with it! Fie, what justice!”

Then she stamped her foot with another wicked little “Fie!” which rang rather mild, and flounced out, and, in accordance with the plain hint of her fastidious liege-lord, repaired to her cabinet and tearfully surrendered to the swarms of her hair-dressers and the keepers of her wardrobe.

Putiphar had as lief have buried the delicate affair in silence. The revulsion of Nefer-hotep’s theatrical indignation was too brusque to be the result of the unsympathetic gallantry of her husband. Had she really entertained a deep sense of injury from the beginning, it should have been deepened, and not driven out by his raillery. “‘Injured innocence,’” he quoted, “‘goeth about with bowed head and rejoiceth at heart, because it hath not come to grief.’” If she

will in this manner lay her grievance before the judges, she will be laughed to scorn. But how can I save her from the law? Joseph surely is not guilty of so evil a deed, unless I know him not! The proverbial 'hours of weakness' I would rather credit to a vivacious woman than to a God-fearing youth who has these many years on all occasions proved himself a model of righteousness and loyalty. Why should she be found alone with him if she knew, as she avers, that he has long been a troublesome suitor for her favor? I will hear Joseph!"

He took the coat and went out into the court where the servants detained Joseph in a stall. The young man was pale and terrified, but submitted without protest to the rude cuffing and buffeting administered to him by his cringing and envious fellow-servants. One would pluck his beard, another would wrap his fingers in his long locks and savagely pull his head hither and thither, while a third would jest at his "airy attire"; for Joseph was clad only in the light tunic which they had irreverently rent and pulled apart at his breast. Others would smite him on the cheek, or on the breast, and point an impudent finger at the strange purpling mark on Joseph's chest, and mockingly exclaim: "She must have clawed thee right heartily; the stripes are as thick as a man's thumb!" At last they tore his garment completely off, leaving him no covering but the customary short apron, and exposing the cruciform mark on his breast by its full length and breadth.

The first glance of Putiphar lighted on that mystic mark. He had heard them tell at Anu of the same mark traced on the breast of Aseneth, but had never suspected that its counterpart was to be found under

his own roof. He was startled. But his surprise was turned into anger when he adverted to the brutal abuse to which the boy had been subjected. "Away with you!" he roared at the vile dastards who had vented a long nourished spleen on the luckless young steward. "Let none of you dare to place an ear to the keyhole, lest I lay him low and hang out his carcass for a prey to the vultures!"

Thereupon the frightened swarm was instantly dispersed, and Putiphar addressed himself to Joseph.

"You are charged, Joseph," he began severely, "with an act of blackest ingratitude committed against my house!"

Joseph arose, but could hardly stand on his feet from pain, and from shame at his nakedness. Putiphar was touched at the pitiful sight, and bade him sit down. He had always borne Joseph the love and trust of a father.

"Why do you not answer?" he continued with feigned severity. "Here is the proof of your crime!" and he held up Joseph's coat.

"Let me put on my coat, good my master," Joseph begged with downcast eyes.

Putiphar threw the coat over the boy's head, and resumed: "What have you done, Joseph? Speak, and make a clean breast of your wickedness! There is question of the honor of my house, of the reputation of my wife! You know that it is easy to choose between the life of a servant and the good name of an honorable woman! A disgraced wife is as dead as one entombed! Speak, Joseph!"

But Joseph did not answer. What would it avail him to rise up against the wife of the chancellor of the pharaoh, he, the foreigner, and the steward of the

chancellor? Who would believe him? And was it not better that he should take the sin of the woman upon himself and suffer its punishment innocently than that he should launch against her a charge inefficient for his own defense, and yet destructive of the joy of his master's life? He had suffered persecution from childhood, nay even exile and bondage, and God had turned his patience into honor and rejoicing. He would leave it to God to take care of his lot!

"So you are guilty?" Putiphar cried at him, angered by his silence. "I should not have thought this of you! In three days you shall appear before the honorable High Gate for judgment. Meanwhile you may take leisure in prison to consider your wickedness!"

But the severe master was by no means convinced of the innocence of his spouse. There was no lack of sympathy in his threats, and his manner strongly savored of affected and forced indignation. Yet it was wiser far to put away the servant for a while, if only for the reason that the scandal would the sooner die out, than to go to Court and air the nasty incident for the diversion of the populace. Whichever of the two was guilty of an indiscretion, would little interest the spectators at the trial, so long as there was furnished an ample supply of interesting details. The evil thing would arouse suspicions, and perhaps lead to the uncovering of other evil things of which Putiphar knew that they could not bear the inspection of the public without injury to the respect due the officers of the king. Hence, "no actual harm having been done," he concluded his considerations, "we shall punish Joseph with a mild sentence of detention in prison, and save a much abused woman the torture of exposing her foibles before the public!"

Joseph was put in bonds and transferred to the police prison which was placed in charge of the "Right Leg" of the pharaoh.

The next day Putiphar entered the department of the royal bakeries in an unusually sullen mood. His inspection was perfunctory, and his directions confused and contradictory. After a while he beckoned to Rahuel to follow him. He retired to the chamber of the chief of the department, and closed the doors.

Rahuel was a Hebrew, a countryman of Joseph, and a shrewd counselor. Putiphar had, during the interval between the scene of his interview with Joseph yesterday, and his own breaking away from home that morning, after a sleepless night, not succeeded in stifling his conscience. Joseph was innocent; so much was unquestionably true. But what could be done to absolve him from the criminal charge without blasting Nefer-hotep's good name? Rahuel should help him out of his dilemma! What was Rahuel so shrewd for!

"What would you do," he began without formal introduction, "if your wife had been insulted?"

"If I had a wife, and that wife of mine were one of the women at Court, I would be silent," he replied with brutal sincerity.

"But if the rumor of the scandal had already gained publicity, and you would be obliged to defend the honor of your house and the honor of the woman?"

"A disgraced woman deserves no defense!"

"But my house, my name, my position!"

"Oh, this is different! It is *your* wife?"

"Yea, even *my* wife! I cannot let this disgrace rest upon her!"

"Who published it?"

"The servants, of course! The man or the maid

about the house, who can keep a quiet tongue, has not yet been born!"

"Why not discharge them and put them out of the way? You have power to disperse them into all the corners of the land!"

"Ay," Putiphar laughed grimly, "so that they may publish this savory news in all the corners of the land!"

"Then cut out their tongues, or cut off their heads! Scandal-mongers do not bear valuable heads at any rate, and their tongues deserve an abbreviated existence."

"That I may not do. My power does not extend over the bodies and the lives of my slaves; and I would not do it, because it is cruel, it is inhuman! You are toying, *Raca*,"¹ he threatened.

Rahuel, for ulterior motives, ignored the sally at his foolhardiness and continued evenly:

"What is the tale of your wife?"

"She says that she was assaulted by one of my servants, a Hebrew, Joseph, my chief steward."

"Do you believe the tale of your wife?"

"*I do not!* Most decidedly not! At best they may have been dallying together; but the supernal candor of the boy is proof that he is innocent even of levity! I have never seen such purity!"

"Then no injury has been done?"

"No, no injury of any kind! But one would think that you are the judge over me and my wife, considering your dictatorial tone!"

Once again Rahuel declined a clash.

"What have you done to Joseph?" he persisted.

"He is condemned to prison."

"Then let him lie and moulder in prison until this

¹ *Fool*.

thing is forgotten. Later you may deliver him and banish him from the city. I would not risk an examination in the Gate. The judges are too well versed in the story of the morality of the ladies at Court, not to dig up some skeletons. The pharaoh would be displeased to have all the little secret scandals of the courtiers aired before the public. It would not be edifying to the people! Has your wife witnesses at hand?"

"No! And that Hebrew is as reticent as a cow. He did not even deign to answer me!"

"He may not have much to say, and may wish to protect your wife. Her honor is sufficiently redeemed by the incarceration of the boy. But have you no proof of any kind?"

"She took his coat from him. I restored it to him for the pity of seeing him suffer."

Now Rahuel burst into laughter.

"Then she was more interested in him than he in her," he chuckled. "A man's honor is in his coat!"

"But why did he not take it back when she tore it away?"

"If he were guilty, he would have taken it back at any hazard; but it seems that through confusion he never noticed that his garment remained in her hands. It would seem more natural that he should have stripped her of her coat."

"Ay!" Putiphar drawled disgustedly, "if she had had one on!"

"Behold, then! Here is the key to the affair: A woman who neglects propriety of dress before her servants, is not entitled to credence when she complains about improprieties on the part of her servants. Let the Hebrew moulder in the dungeon, and may

your pretty spouse bloom — in the full possession of her little nose which the judges will decree to be forfeit if she appears with so unlikely a tale in the Gate!"

Putiphar was much inclined to be of the same opinion. If Joseph's countryman discovered no injustice in the imprisoning of Joseph, why should *he* entertain misgivings? If Joseph is innocent, at least Nefer-hotep is delivered from temptation; and if perchance Joseph should have forgotten that he was only a servant in the house, then he is not ill served with a taste of humbleness. "We will let the matter rest for the present," he said, "and leave the curiosity of the venerable dames of the Court unsatisfied! I have more important and urgent business on hand than meddling with women and their self-imposed burdens of unending troubles. You have heard that the king is gone abroad to draw together the army of the marsh-land for an expedition into Asia?"

"I have; but —"

"No, not *but*! Will you never learn that a king will not tolerate a 'but'? Segor refuses to pay its annual tribute, and must needs be brought back to reason. The king has intrusted P'tehebra with the conduct of the campaign. So, now you may 'but' me if you have anything of the nature of a comment in your mind!"

"You have anticipated my doubt. If the king remains at home, all will be well."

"At Thebes? No, friend Rahuel. Thebes chafes at her peace of bondage. Thebes will fret, or be free! The princes of the ancient houses of the nobility will own and rule their own country, or die. But they will never be at rest! They have refused to pay their last semi-annual tribute to the king's treasury. We shall have to chastise them!"

"Is P'tehebra acquainted with the country and the mode of warfare at the borderland?"

"Ay, sufficiently. He even speaks the speech of Segor."

"It is well! I would have offered my services to him as guide and adviser, as I know the country from end to end."

"Your services are required here. What do you think of Hakar?"

"Hakar is an emissary of the conspirators."

Putiphar sprang at Rahuel.

"And was presented before the king! Why did you not disclose his character?"

"Because he can do no harm alone, and I have him covered at every step."

"Then his charge against Ai-defa is false?"

"False, ay, my lord! That commission of the local captaincy of the League was never intended to reach Ai-defa. It was I who marked it as spurious by attaching the seal of the sheiks to it in transit. My friend and brother *Nat-anh* delivered it first to me, after he had intercepted and removed the messenger of the Leaguers. Ai-defa had long before withdrawn from the loose allegiance he had held with the dummies of the temple school. But Pent-Amen is not a stranger to the work of undermining the authority of the pharaoh."

"Pent-Amen? Rahuel! The son of P'tehebra?"

"The same! You have noted that neither he nor his father was much interested in the person of the murderer of Neht-nefert?"

"Ay, it did seem unnatural! Do they know the murderer?"

"I think so. And they are waiting for an opportunity

to settle their account with him in the confusion of the approaching uprising. Or why else should they wish to evade the necessity of a search throughout Anu by the constituted authorities? They presume that the present condition of things will not last much longer."

"Then I should stop P'tehebra on his return from the funeral! A traitor at the head of an army of twenty thousand men! Rahuel, you are not toying with the fortunes of an empire?"

"Let P'tehebra proceed! There is no more active and obedient servant than a designing servant. He will serve his king with scrupulous loyalty until the day of his reckoning. But increase the garrisons of the southern provinces, and have them closely organized, and ready at a moment's notice for action. It will put a check on the audacity of the Thebans. Draw together the troops stationed in Punt and throw them upon the province in Thebes. These Arabs and black men of the desert and the mountains might revolt if left to themselves in the event of an outbreak of rebellion."

"Rahuel, I shall propose your counsel to the king and his captains, and recommend you for the honor and office of *Mer-Medaiu*! But how have you yourself come in possession of the secrets of the conspiracy? The king surely will desire to know a good deal more about you than I can tell him, before he accepts dictation from you, a foreigner!"

"I am always at the service of the pharaoh! And as to my connection with the League: Zoroith is the wife of Ai-defa, and once was my ward. She is under obligations to me for her life."

"I do not like the woman. She is too inhumanly deep! Yet I had rather she were here than at Thebes

under the existing conditions. She may again lead Ai-defa astray, for she hates him."

"False notion, my lord, false notion; wholly false! She clings to Ai-defa with all the instinct of a loyal heart, and if anyone on earth would die to save Ai-defa from traitorous associations, it is Zoroith!"

"But she carries a knife to kill him!"

"No, not to kill *him* — unless he should force her to return to his house."

"Ah! She despises him!"

"For one act of cruelty that he committed against her, she despises him and loathes him; and yet she is as faithful to him as a dog. She knows no other master, nor would adopt another. He was perhaps not her first and only ideal and idol. But if she was ever disappointed, she set him up in place of her earlier idol, and, that demolished, her heart went down with him in his fall."

"Then I shall tell the king that your information comes through a woman's mouth?" Putiphar observed doubtfully and critically.

"Never!" Rahuel exploded. "Zoroith has never spoken a word to me since the day I relinquished her to Ai-defa; and she would not speak to me, nor as much as recognize a salutation from me! But she instantly recognized my seal on the messages handed to Binyah and to Ai-defa, and, at first, by her affected terror, and then by her brave reticence, forced both Pent-Amen and Ai-defa out of their retirement, and goaded them on to such conduct as revealed their hand. It was patient labor to drive them from hiding, and a devious course that led to their lair; but it was crowned with complete success. Only after I was certain of the prey did I send word to *Nat-anh* about

my discovery, and instructed him to obtain feeling with the heads of the League at Thebes. *Nat-anh* is the bosom friend of Hakar."

"How many of you are working at this scheme?"

"Only myself and *Nat-anh*, and our mutual informant and messenger, Ben-Eder, a man of the parts of a mole and a weasel combined."

"And what is your object?"

"The favor of the pharaoh and your own good-will — solely the good of the country that has adopted us among its own sons, the children of honor and prosperity!"

"A noble object, Rahuel; a noble object, 'pon my troth! A noble legend for perpetual memory on a tombstone! Rahuel, I will have the king ratify your appointment the day he shall return! But have you reaped no reward but a ring and a patent? Such sacrifice is worth a villa and a hundredweight of gold and a drove of cattle!"

"We bide in patience the recognition of the king! My brother *Nat-anh* plies his craft of goldsmith to some profit. But he has been bled by the League until he is as empty as the cast-off shell of a crab. Yet bleed he must again in order to retain the confidence of Hakar and his ilk!"

"I will assign to you a swift vessel laden and provisioned and manned. It will be to your welfare not to open the bronze chest which I will put aboard, until you shall hand it to *Nat-anh*; for you shall be alone on the ship with a crew of greedy sailors. Sleep on that box, and make it your table at meat, and your footstool at your ease! I will fill it with silver and gold as a token of my joy over so faithful a pair of friends of the king as you and your brother have proved your-

selves to be. I will give you the seal of Pent-Amen. Rahuel, I do not know how worthily to requite such disinterested service!"

But when Rahuel left the cabinet of the chancellor at the close of the interview, he murmured to himself:

"Be patient, old fool. You will in due time become interested to your full capacity in this our service, and you will learn, if you survive your surprise, that we work not without keeping a watchful eye on our pay!"

In the evening he received, by messenger from the chancellor, the new seal of butler to the pharaoh. In the absence of Pent-Amen the office was filled by one of the captains of princely rank who were always about the king. But it was not necessary that Rahuel should actually serve the king in person; his title was sufficient to insure him the privilege of being numbered among the stewards of the royal board, and of being honored as a member of the royal household, an officer of the "Double High House." If the patent of the *Mer-Medaiu* also was duly executed and delivered, Rahuel was to be reckoned among the highest dignitaries of the kingdom.

The seal of his new office was enclosed in a small casket of silver. When he opened the case he found not only the seal and the document authenticating it, but also a letter directing him to put Pent-Amen under arrest and to watch every step of Ai-defa. Putiphar was made so anxious by the unlooked-for disclosures of Rahuel that he would run no risks of incurring the displeasure of the pharaoh through an accidental outcropping of traitorous activity in the capital. Ai-defa had once been in bad company. Who knows but that a recrudescence of old habits may have occurred? The

actual conditions at Thebes verified every item of Rahuel's revelations. Prudence and vigor were necessary now to keep the seditious spirit in check. And Putiphar quietly complimented himself on having found so willing and so practical a co-laborer in the cause of the government as the astute Rahuel. "I have buried a servant," he chuckled, recalling the fate of Joseph, and rubbing his hands, "but I have dug up a king!"





Chapter Fortieth

THE COLONY

THE desert which lies between the fertile fields of the Nile valley and the border of the Red Sea, a wild, broken, hilly, and stony country, alive with wild beasts, irrigated by innumerable springs, and dotted with deep natural cisterns of clear and cold water, was inhabited by a tribe of intelligent, hardy, and warlike Arabs, of the family descended from Abraham and his second wife, Ketura. The numerous deep ravines and bottomless pits and caverns were made the homes of large and bold bands of robbers and freebooters, and the secrecy of the locust tree and acacia-grown mountainside was a standing invitation to outlawed rebels and murderers, there to seek shelter and refuge from pursuit and the avenging arm of the law.

In this wilderness, which Rahuel and his few surviving followers, after their adventurous escape from the Arabs of the opposite coast, had traversed in their quest of the Land of Plenty, Nathan had established a station for the hoarding of his loot gathered at Thebes. Omri and Zambri who had each married several Arab girls at once, were placed at the head of the lonely establishment.

Their principal occupation was to assist Nathan quietly and secretly in transferring his booty from the

boats on the Nile, and in guarding it from their jealous neighbors.

In the course of several years they had piled up a considerable mass of valuable goods of every description — in the first place, silver and gold in the current form of money, that is, in rings of a certain standard weight, in bars, bags of gold dust, and nuggets of various natural sizes requiring the services of the scale for determining their value. Of these precious metals they had gathered several *kikkarim*¹ which were tied up in bags of coarse linen, and stored away in the cracks and fissures of the rocks within their cave-storehouse.

But besides this treasure in bullion, they had filled several small chests with golden jewels, such as earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and other trinkets universally affected by the vainglorious Egyptians of both sexes — for ornament, generally, but also as insignia of honors and offices conferred by the pharaoh and his affable queen. Of rich garments, and of costly, fine *pa-sas*,² they had collected so large a quantity that for their transportation by water would now be required a large freight boat of the size of those which carried on trade between the Upper and the Lower Land, between Thebes and Tanis. These boats were built broad and flat, and not very long, and were provided both with mast and sails, and with a rudder. The capacity of the ordinary craft of this type might have been ten thousand pounds of grain shipped in large earthen pots, or simply heaped up in the bottom of the vessel; or of fifty bundles of linen, each bundle con-

¹ A "circle," or "globe"; the largest Hebrew weight for metals, containing sixty pounds, and worth three thousand shekels.

² Byssus.

taining five thousand cubits, which is as much as the wealthy would employ in wrapping a single corpse for the tomb.

At Thebes was situated the large national cemetery of the original race of Egyptians, and the opportunities of procuring valuable remnants of the most precious fabrics were not rare. The last bargain that Nathan had made was that of several thousand cubits of byssus remaining unused after the burial of Neht-nefert, the sister of Pent-Amen. Both the prodigal butler of the pharaoh and his wealthy father had taken pride in making at the funeral of the hapless girl as great a display of their wealth as well as of their affection and sorrow as the ceremonial would permit. They had also decked out the mummy with all the jewelry in which the maid had gloried during her brief spring of life, and had deposited beside her casket of red carved stone all her toys and trinkets, arranged in a circle around the urn which contained her heart.

But when Pent-Amen paid a last visit to the elaborate chapel of his beloved sister's monument, he was grieved to notice that the tomb had been looted, and that even the golden mask over the face of the dead girl had been removed and stolen. Had he stopped the bark which was then placidly sailing down the river with a lone sailor at its tiller, he would have had the desecrator of Neht-nefert's tomb at his mercy, in the person of that jackal, Nathan.

Rahuel met that bark in midstream. He was coming up from Memphis in a fast vessel which was the property of the crown. On its peak gleamed the gilded disk of the sun set between a pair of silver horns, the emblem of Hathor, the ancient goddess of love, of life, and of plenty. Beneath this emblem was set the

head of the goddess with its silvery shimmering face turned out upon Hhapi,¹ the father of the gods.

Nathan did not at first pay any attention to the inmates of the boat. He had recognized her as a royal vessel, and had steered far out of her course. The penalty for looting the resting places of the dead was beheading, a most disastrous punishment, because it deprived its victim of the boon of the resurrection; and a most execrable punishment, because it drew into the disgrace of the delinquent also all his relatives and friends, and subjected kith and kin to the contempt of the entire community. And although Nathan had little regard for the legal and social consequences of decapitation, yet he had a most sensitive regard for his head.

But as he ventured a look at the boat, when he was far enough out of deep water not to tempt the keener keeled craft to pursuit, he observed that the occupant of the first seat above deck was amusing himself with spitting out between the silver horns of Hathor, and on the beaming disk. This rude play arrested his attention, for no Egyptian would have made himself guilty of such blasphemy. He looked closer, and discovered that it was Rahuel.

Hailing his chief with a cry of joy, he held towards the gallant little bark of the king, and perceived both by the aid of his eyes and his nose that Rahuel was chewing garlic and leek, and squirting the juice in contempt over the head of the frivolous Hathor.

Rahuel had been advised at Anu by Nathan of the prosperity of the colony in the mountainous heights near the sea, and knew its value for serving both as a magazine for their loot, and as a stepping stone for

¹ Personification of the Nile.

their departure from the heathen land of Mizraim, after they should have garnered their harvest. He was seated on a chest which was covered and wrapped with a mat, and solid and heavy as a stone. It was the box which Putiphar had sent to the dock under guard. After a brief greeting, Rahuel ordered two of his crew of five boatmen to transfer the chest to the other craft, and himself sprang from his boat into that of his accomplice, and directed his men to turn about and follow Nathan's lead.

In a few hours they landed in a cove on the eastern bank. There the crew of the "Hathor" were bidden to pitch camp and await the return of their master. At the landing place were found two men in dirty and disheveled breech-cloths — and nothing more, who were exercising authority over half-a-dozen frisky and self-willed donkeys. The chest of Rahuel, and the caskets and bundles which Nathan hauled from the bottom of his boat, all securely wrapped and strapped, were loaded on the sturdy little beasts, and the small troop proceeded inland at a lively pace. Not far from the edge of the cove, the twain porters of disreputable aspect produced two mules which had been brought along for their own convenience and comfort, but which they generously surrendered to the new arrivals, they themselves trudging along on foot between the burdened, quick-footed beasts.

These two willing assistants of Nathan were none other than Omri and Zambri. Rahuel had abstained at the landing from saluting them, taking the cue from Nathan who treated them as common laborers hired for such mean service. It would not do to arouse the suspicions of the strange crew by exhibiting in their presence signs of recognition, or of familiarity with

men of so lowly a station of life. But once well within the solemn and solitary region of the hills, the four cast aside their reserve, and entered into a lively conference about their past achievements each in his own sphere, and about their designs and ambitions for the future.

Arriving at the colony in the heart of the rocky wilderness, Rahuel met with a sight which instantly elicited from his clay-colored, composed face a smile of irony and scorn. About the four tents arranged in a square hedged with thorny, hard, and dry-looking shrubbery, a crowd of children, seemingly all of the same age of about four and five years, were disporting themselves amid promiscuous flocks of squawking geese and ducks, and gamboling with a troop of frolicking kids and their mothers, deftly declining the playful but stupidly direct attacks of several sturdy he-goats distributed among the lively actors of this bucolic scene. The animal members of the troop were not expected to present themselves in sartorial disguise of any sort; but the human participants should have been expected to be dressed in the semblance of their kind. Yet the actors of both the feathered and the hairy tribe, being the wards of provident nature, wore more covering, not to speak of adornment, than their human playmates, who seemed not inclined to improve upon the providence of nature exhibited in their behalf, scant though it was, confining itself to providing the mud with which to cover their skin.

In the center of the free space between the tents, various solicitous mothers were moving about an open hearth, turning spits and shaking up fuming loaves simmering and sitting low on hot stones, and stirring despondent pots into activity. From the ways and

manners of their mothers, the children seemed to have acquired the habit of carrying themselves *en déshabillé*. In Egypt, an apron about the loins was the least demand that fashion made for decency's sake; and in just so far these women acceded to the demands of that tyrant of the gentle sex that they affected a breech-clout not much superior in color and style to the natural garb provided by kindly mother earth for their children.

Rahuel stood still, and stared at the spectacle with the nonplussed, helpless persistence that an inexperienced but pugnacious bull pup might exercise in watching a curled-up hedgehog. Where in the world had these people learned to go so close to the bosom of the common mother of all that they might as well have been dug out of the ground — so that they reeked of the soil, with racing, purling, bubbling, splashing, and spattering water all around them? It was a wonder how they contrived to escape every drop of it! It was not the custom of the Chanaanites to be dirty, nor of the Arabs, nor of the Midianites; but it was, to an indeclinable evidence, the custom of the cultivators of this malodorous spot of unfortunate mother earth!

Nathan pulled and pushed Rahuel into the first tent where his porters had already entered, and requested him to be seated. But, "Nay, brother!" Rahuel protested with outspread fingers of both hands. "Nay, nay! Let me say it fifty times and seventy times! Nay!" with a shriek as frightful as the blast of a cracked ram's horn. And Rahuel walked out in disregard of the rules of hospitality, and began to inspect his shining white garments, and to wave them gently, and dubiously, all the time watching with bulgingly vigilant eyes for the fruits of his endeavors of preserving

the integrity, not only of his exterior self, but also of that part which was exposed beneath the cover of garments to the attacks of aspiring guests of the kind that love to lodge unbidden in affluent ease within such products of the textile art as commonly serve the bodily comfort of unsuspecting sleepers.

But even brother Nathan soon followed him, imitating Rahuel's mimicry of the game of war, but with greater energy, and, seemingly, with better results. He had for a minute or two reclined on the mats of the floor, yielding to fatigue, and had challenged the silent and bloodthirsty hosts sleeping on their arms in ambush, and had vacated his position on the field of battle in a disgraceful rout. Omri and Zambri, on the other hand, with a recklessness born of habit, generously offered their begrimed aprons for a gymnasium to the agile horde of brown-skinned lancers, and surrendered to them the regions in the keep of those benevolent abbreviations of the unmanly tunic as an object of spirited contention. An occasional pat, or grasp, administered for a remonstrance against audacious encroachments, was the only indication of the interest they took in the explorations, experiments, and discoveries recorded in the dark. For the rest, they gnawed their bone in peace, and in enviable contentment called forth from their modest fancy visions of such bliss and reveling as were sure to accrue from the diligence and sagacity of the meek Nathan.

Meanwhile, Nathan, accompanied by the curious Rahuel, put away his latest spoils in a cave not far from the tents, and showed to his companion the piles of treasure stored "between the ribs of the earth," as he put it, and ready for transportation at the "clapping of hands."

"If we cultivated not the habits of savages hereabout," he explained in defense of the prevailing filthiness of the colony, "our neighbors would descend upon us and deplete our stores of good things in the winking of an eye. But knowing us as sordid dwellers of an envious and grudging spot, they cover their noses with the skirt of their coats when they chance to pass by."

"System and sense are no excuse for such a parade of filth," Rahuel returned savagely. "If these people will some day submit to a cleansing, they must be washed inside and outside; that is, the best way to cleanse them is to drown them — the whole brood! Nathan, is it possible that those children are the offspring of rational beings! Is it possible that these women were born of mothers, and were not grown like mushrooms on a dunghill? Fie! Let me away ere I see them again! O Zoroith!"

"Ay, Zoroith?" Nathan echoed quizzically; "she is an angel compared to these mud-larks —" But he stopped abruptly, wonderingly rehearsing within himself Rahuel's devout invocation of Zoroith's name. It had produced a painful twang in his heartstrings.

"What every woman ought to be!" Rahuel gratefully supplemented the fervent tribute of Nathan. The Egyptians were scrupulous in their care for cleanliness of person and attire, and Rahuel's fastidious temperament had readily taken to an admiration of this beautiful trait. He was shocked. He felt the disreputable uncleanness of this colony as a personal insult.

"Is there any progress in the sedition?" he inquired, adverting to Nathan's absence from Thebes.

"The nearer the hour for the blow, the greater is the concern of the leaders," Nathan replied.

"Is Pent-Amen still in Thebes?"

"He is, indeed, and will be obliged to tarry a little longer," Nathan answered, and unwrapped the golden mask of Neht-nefert.

Rahuel started back at seeing the mask which was an exact likeness of the face of the girl he had murdered, from the neatly plaited hair over the large eyes, the small and fine nose and the full mouth and round cheeks and chin down to the smooth throat. It was modeled in high relief, and weighed about four *maneh*,¹ a feature which was calculated to soften the sting of the harrowing remembrance of the misdeed.

"He will have a new portrait made before he leaves the tomb," Nathan proceeded, elated over his good luck. "But the old man departed over a week ago to lead an expedition somewhere into Chanaan."

"How have you caught this official news?" Rahuel asked in surprise. He had believed himself to be the only confidant of Putiphar.

"Through Hakar. The jolly chancellor took him into the secret as far back as the feast-days of Anu."

"Putiphar is a superannuated old hen that cackles over eggs laid by another!" Rahuel cried angrily. "Just Hakar is the man to hear such news, the emissary of the revolution! I am surprised that the Leaguers do not strike instantly, when they know that a large force of men are about to leave the country!"

"A large force of men? No; you are again misinformed! The Philistines have stopped a large consignment of wood at Ghaza. It is to release the property of the pharaoh that P'tehebra is sent away. Eight hundred men are the whole force at his disposal for the expedition. But the pharaoh has mobilized

¹ Pound.

ten thousand troops to be placed under P'tehebra's command for a raid on Midian and the Arabs. That earlier insignificant expedition is only a preliminary — a test of the conditions here in the South. It is a challenge to Thebes. If Thebes takes up the gauntlet, those ten thousand troops will be sent up here. But Thebes is fully aware of the trap. Hence Putiphar has given you only a sketch of impending events as they are indeed planned, but shall not be developed until after they have stood their test."

"True, Nathan; and his reason may be, to urge me to greater activity in the work of goading the Thebans on to rebellion. But this is a dangerous task that might be turned to show a face of treason. I will wait until I shall receive my patent as *Mer-Medaiu*, as a duly accredited officer of the royal military. A cloak is nearer the skin than a banner! Can we gain contact with the threatened Arabs?"

"It would be useless now to agitate for an uprising, or to arouse the Arabs. The Thebans are on the anxious seat, knowing that their secret preparations are revealed to the pharaoh. Sekenen-Ra,¹ their head, is a man of exceeding prudence and coolness."

"Then I must take the news of this change of sentiment to Putiphar, when I shall have put Pent-Amen in bonds!" But Rahuel was assiduously thinking of the Arabs!

"Ay?"

"He is under ban for conspiracy."

"But he takes less interest in the conspiracy than you and I! How can you prove your charge?"

"Do not the Thebans know of the most secret

¹ This prince is probably the pharaoh who ultimately accomplished the expulsion of the Hyksos.

plans of the government? Putiphar knows that Hakar wrought the leakage. But Hakar is at my mercy. I have denounced him as a secret spy, which he is. If he ever again sets foot across the border of the Theban province, the gallows shall be his welcome by Putiphar! Therefore, there shall be none to gainsay me when I make Pent-Amen the accomplice of the traitorous informant of the League. And who but he could be so well acquainted with the intended movements of the armies of the North, now that he has spent many weeks in the company of his fond father? If I could only implicate Ai-defa also! I desire with much desire to bring him down for the ruin of Zoroith!"

In the prospect of removing Ai-defa, Nathan instantly became so interested that he nearly lost his breath.

"I can be of assistance to you in working this trick," he seconded Rahuel hurriedly. "Ai-defa plundered the treasury for the sum which he lent Pent-Amen at the slave market when they bought the Het-merit.¹ Hakar is my witness, and the priests of Ammon, to whom he has made a written confession in order to clear himself of the charge of refusing to pay his contributions to the League, and in order to protect himself against their exorbitant demands for money. In that confession he offers to rob the royal treasury if it be commanded, and if he obtain a prominent post in the League."

"Can you procure this document?"

"I will procure it, at the risk of my head."

"It is well. Steal it, if necessary, but, by all means, get the original! Have you inspected it?"

"I found it one day among the papers of Hakar,

¹ The beautiful Hittite (Binyah).

and read it. Ai-defa, in defense of his theft, accuses his colleague Pent-Amen of having urged him to abstract the sum from his monthly allowance for the royal bakeries, and meanwhile to retrench expenses until he himself should receive the amount from his father. Pent-Amen has paid his debt, but Ai-defa turned the money into the coffers of the League. Such are some of the interesting facts stated in Ai-defa's apology."

"Capital, *Nat-anh!*" Rahuel complimented the sneak with a slight flush of good humor. "Secure that document, and I shall put the twain deposed ministers of the board of the "Double High House" in chains!"

"Will you then lend me your arm and your tongue in persuading Zoroith to follow me into my tent?"

"Your tent here?" Rahuel scolded. "If you let her take a whiff of this pesthole, she will be more lost to you than ever!"

"Nay, brother. I intend to return to Chanaan with Zoroith and a portion of our treasures."

Rahuel fell into a pensive mood. After a long pause of suspense for the covetous Nathan, Rahuel raised his head, slowly and diffidently. Large beads of perspiration stood on his lowering brow. "Zoroith," he said acridly, and hesitated; "Zoroith —" again meditatively — "Zoroith is too pure a woman for you!"

It was rather late, but it was nice for Rahuel to make so flattering a confession of his admiration for his former ward, and Nathan flew into a rage that ended in a succession of convulsions. He flung himself on the ground, and rolled and tossed about, and madly bellowed maledictions at his unrelenting keeper. But Rahuel left him, and snatching up the halter of a

robust ass, mounted without ceremony, and rode away in the direction of the river.

On the way he murmured and grumbled to himself. "She was mine!" he snarled savagely; and after a spell of inarticulate growling, he added: "She shall not be another's!"





Chapter Forty-first

THE CEMETERY

SAMMA had by degrees drifted into Thebes. He was now following the humble trade of a potter, because it often brought him close to the wine presses and wine-houses of the wealthy; for he claimed it as an exclusive privilege for himself to guide and steer his shipments of pots and bottles down the Nile, and to deliver them in person at the vineyards and storehouses from which they were ordered. The journey down the river soon became to him a pastime and a pleasure. His large stock of ware, often totaling more than a hundred vessels of all sizes, he usually tied together by the ears into a raft, laid a comfortable seat of light boards across the mouths of those floating in the center, and plied a large, light paddle for picking his course.

It was a delight for him to sit singing and whistling in the midst of his crunching and grinding flock that sailed along as steadily as a flock of contented geese. In the beginning, the wash of a boat passing too close once in a while had filled and upset some of the pots at the edge; but he then wisely put in that place of danger only broad-shouldered, long-necked, and narrow-mouthed bottles, and thus saved himself a great deal of annoyance and labor in the future.

Thus he was riding another drove of large-bellied

winepots down from the potteries of Thebes, when he met the resplendent royal bark of Rahuel. The sailors of the "Hathor" were not a little out of humor over Rahuel's delay, and were looking for an opportunity to vent their wrath on some inoffensive navigator. Samma in his comical posture in the center of so unsightly and multitudinous a craft, with his feet dangling in one of the large-necked pots, and his brawny arms dexterously wielding the uncommonly elongated paddle, dipping it fore and aft, on the wind and the lee, offered himself as a welcome drain for their ruffled temper.

They held their keel directly down the wind, and drove it full tilt into the close ranks of his fragile float. On this trip Samma had shipped no bottles of the kind that would not dip and fill, and several lines of his pots were broken, or cut loose, and were dancing and spinning away in all directions, or were upset, and filled up, and sank out of sight, dragging the others, and at last also their pilot, down into the gurgling stream.

But the rompish crew would not push their prank to the length of inflicting personal injury. They fished Samma out of the water with a boat-hook and landed him on the "Hathor," laying him at the feet of Rahuel, "as an offering from the 'fertile' waves," they said.

Rahuel was not in a mood to enter into their re-awakened cheerfulness. Yet he showed no anger. A faint smile, like the grin of a tiger, flashed over his face when he recognized in the ponderous, dripping, and spouting capture from the deep, his burly tribesman. The sun was warm and the atmosphere dry, so that the shipwrecked sailor could take no harm. Rahuel pointed to a perspiring jug under the bench on which he was seated. It contained wine which was

kept fresh by an envelope of wet cloths dipped in a solution of salt and water. To the open displeasure of the crew, Samma declined the proffered cup, unstopped the jug, and lifted it up over his head at a most promising angle of inclination — and kept it there as long as he could hold his breath. Then he sidled up to Rahuel and sat down, setting the jug between his feet.

“The sight of you, brother,” he began airily, “is as a salve of honey and balsam to my eyes!”

He had already forgotten his loss, which was not so much his as his master’s. It would bring him a flogging and a term of abstinence, if he returned to his employer. But how could Samma think of returning to a stern and exacting master, when he had found a jug of wine and his “brother” Rahuel! Such a paradox never entered his comfortable mind.

“Have you seen — Zoroith?” Rahuel questioned, ignoring Samma’s cheerful compliment, but hesitating at the risk of taking so uncouth and negligent a man into his confidence. His anxiety to know of the woman whom he had once discarded from his care as well as from his mind, must have been beyond his control.

“Zoroith?” Samma echoed blankly. “Zoroith —! No — yes! *Soreet*, they call her at the tomb.”

“Whose tomb?”

“Neht-nefert’s tomb, of course! There is no tomb so much frequented as that of the pretty girl who was murdered by an Arab chief. But the curious visit there as much for the sake of *Soreet* as for the sake of Neht-nefert. *Soreet*, they say, is dead in the heart. She is as silent as a little bird forsaken and starved, and hangs her head like the bud of the lotus with the

heart eaten out by worms, and wrings her hands at times as the wind twists a banner and flings it on high and wrenches it until it is rent in tatters. The people say she is holding her heart in her hands; this is why she so often claws her knees and her breast, and then raises aloft her tightly clasped hands. I have seen blood on her lips. Her hair is almost as white as her face and her garb. She is dying by — ”

“Stop, brute!” Rahuel snorted. Samma stopped, and looked terrified. It was not so safe a guess whether he also felt the terror he displayed, for he stooped, and lifted up the sedately reposing jug. Rahuel disgustingly pushed him backwards off the bench so that he fell in a heap on the floor of the boat, with the jug securely hugged to his breast. From that incident, Rahuel remained deaf to all of Samma’s overtures at reopening a conversation. The sailors, noticing the apathy of their master, set themselves to cuffing and jostling Samma in secret to the full of their resentment of his gluttonous affection for the winepot. He returned their ungracious attentions measure for measure with his unshod feet, and grinned contentedly at their scowling faces over the broad shoulders of his robust jug of comfort.

This play of hostility lasted with occasional interruptions until they landed at Thebes. Here Samma once again attempted to conciliate the good-will of Rahuel; but Rahuel contemptuously brushed him aside, paid his crew and directed them to keep the craft ready for the return voyage on the morrow. Then he left them and went up into the city. Samma followed him a short distance, vociferously crying after him, not to let him perish at the hands of a defrauded master; but, his efforts failing, he sat down by the roadside,

weeping loud and most disconsolately. He would be obliged to leave Thebes, as he could easily be picked out from any crowd of workmen on account of his extraordinary proportions. So he again shuffled down to the wharves in the evening and took passage on a boat laden with wine which was to leave that night for Memphis, and would proceed as far as Anu whither he thought his fate had been calling him for many an idle day.

Rahuel went directly to the burial-ground. When he found the miniature pyramid erected over the subterranean chamber where Neht-nefert was entombed, he was sorely disappointed at the persistence with which his repeated requests for permission to enter it were declined by the guards. He offered them a handful of golden rings; but they refused to look at them. He begged and pleaded and argued. "The dear dead is a friend of mine," he lied in despair. "I would place a golden crown on her head — and I will put a golden ring on each finger of both hands of you both — only let me in to recite the forty-two deadly sins¹ over her heart and to expiate them with the reciting of the names of forty-two of her prettiest virtues!"

But no. "Go your way in peace," he was curtly bidden. The guards were inexorable.

He went his way, but not in peace. Inwardly he was cursing the greed of Nathan who had brought about this stony rigor of watchfulness by his looting of the tomb. But he did not go very far away. He threw himself down behind another pyramid along the cemetery path, a rod from Neht-nefert's magnificent monument.

Rahuel was going to pieces. He was fully aware

¹ In the *Book of the Dead*.

of the revolution boiling within him, and assailing and storming the stronghold of his ambitions and his yearning for revenge. His pride, his hatred, his lust of glory were crumbling into dust, light fabrics of stupidity and stubbornness that they were. Another passion was clearing the ground for establishing its sway, equally extortionate, but much more human; in fact, so much more human that against his will, like a mighty eagle, it bore him irresistibly on high, nearer that love which, the fathers used to tell, God bears towards His erring children. He was being despoiled of his armor and arms, and found himself flung helpless at the feet of a woman, upon whom he had trodden, whom he had cast aside and neglected — the unfortunate Zoroith.

It had come over him like a fever, breaking out with irrepressible violence after a long-continued and easy practise of repression. It had been felt, and declined; it had clamored, and had been silenced. It had not been suspected of gathering such formidable power that it could overwhelm him. But it had deceived him, like waters slowly gathering in a large basin, and chafing at the dam, laying bare the rock structure, and stealthily loosening stone after stone, until at last, with a mighty impetus, unforeseen and unprovided for, the accumulated mass hurls itself against the crumbling wall and sweeps it away without leaving a vestige either of its former strength or of its existence.

Rahuel's ears were still roaring with the rush of the last assault of his imperiously rearing passion for the misused woman. At his last conference with Putiphar, he had undertaken her defense, and, for the second time since he had discarded her, had alluded to the part he himself had played in her short existence, much to his

own discomfort; for he had thought he had conquered and exterminated the light flush of affection he had borne her for having selected him as her companion and protector.

Now he reflected that he had already taken a fancy to her at the ceremony of their initiation into the brotherhood of her tribe; that he had been much concerned about her when he found her in the wreckage of her father's bark; that he had envied Nathan for his solicitude about her comfort at the landing on the sea shore; that he was gratified with a sweet sense of calm contentment when she chose him who had not competed for her favor; that he had called her his daughter. Later on he had suppressed his growing affection for the furthering of his ambition and for nursing his detestation of the chastisement he had received at P'tehebra's hands.

How foolishly he had fought against himself! How foolishly he had cast away a life of bliss at her side! How foolishly he had employed every trick and stratagem to escape the silken cord which she was twining about his heart! And it would have been bliss indeed to be made her captive, had he only listened to his better sense, and abandoned his insane hatred!

Now she was married; she belonged by law to another. She had said within his hearing that she would neither salute him, nor return to Ai-defa. She was hurt, and the wound was not healed. She was hurt by him when he abandoned her in the streets of Memphis; hurt, because he neglected her ardent solicitations for his love!

Could that wound be healed now? Could that spark be roused again to a consuming fire? Ai-defa had to be removed! She would not transfer her law-

ful allegiance to another so long as she owed it in honor to Ai-defa! It was opposed to the traditions both of the Egyptians and of his own tribe that a man should tempt a married woman from her fealty. He desired not to win a divided heart; either nothing, or Zoroith with all her teeming love, her heart, head, hand, and whole personality. Had he not persecuted Ai-defa solely because in secret, and almost unconsciously, he envied him the possession of this woman?

He was sighing and groaning under the stress of contending passions, like a lonely palm tree agitated by the poisonous, furious Simoon,¹ when he saw a shadow falling and resting at the edge of the mausoleum. The original of the shadow had come to a stop at the other side of the miniature pyramid, close behind the northern corner. It was impossible to distinguish whether the dark figure on the ground was the image of a man or of a woman. It was elongated by the brilliant, slant light of the low moon, and it was spread out across from head to foot by the fulness of the garb worn by its pattern.

Rahuel silently arose to hide. Opposite the pyramid was a thicket of luxuriant acacias and locust trees, and at the southern edge of the pyramid was an open chapel, the antechamber of a tomb. He decided quickly upon choosing the safer place, and crawled on hands and feet, in the shadow of the pyramid, into the dark chapel, and concealed himself behind the clustering columns of the doorway.

His heart was beating loud and fast: "It may be Zoroith!"

After a brief pause of suspense, he heard a light

¹ A hot and dry wind blowing in Arabia and neighboring countries; very destructive.

footfall and the light and airy flutter of loose garments drawing near, and through the chinks between the slender columns of his hiding-place he saw a slight and richly garbed figure selecting for a seat the very edge of the low and slightly projecting base of the chapel entrance, directly under his eyes.

The head and face of the figure were veiled. But this feature was not distinctive of the dress of either woman or man in Egypt. The color of the outer garments was white, with a broad collar of alternating white and blue stripes descending in front to the middle of the breast, and running over the shoulders in gathering pleats. This was the color of mourning, commonly worn by both men and women of estate. It could easily be distinguished as soon as Rahuel's eyes had become used to the gloom, because the attire of the quiet visitor was of that costly, diaphanous material, which was as densely woven as mist, but also as translucent as the hazy creation of the deft-fingered moon.

Had it not been for the double veil drawn over the head, he might have had a glimpse of the more distinctive headdress and of the face. For he noted the protrusion of some figure over the top of the head under the veil. It might be the crest of Horus, or of Anubis, and would indicate the wearer of that ornament as a man and official; or it might be merely an artificial puckering of the brocade of which the headdress might be made and which was raised and fashioned to assume the fantastic shape of a bird's head perched on top of the head and enveloping it down to the neck, running close behind the ears. Then it would designate its wearer as a woman. Or it might be the tiara of the "prophets" and "prophetesses"; in which case it

would indicate that the wearer belonged to the ranks of the priesthood.

These speculations were passing through Rahuel's mind while he was with bated breath watching and examining the mysterious nightly visitor of the cemetery.

The figure sat motionless and silent for a long while. Rahuel was losing patience with himself for the necessity of holding his breath and of standing still and avoiding every move of his limbs. The rustle of his clothes would have betrayed him. He bent forward a little and inclined his head in an attitude of attentive listening. Could he hear a breath of this silent breast, or see this immovable bosom heave? The stillness was marvelous. Was this visitor an angel? He had heard the story of Abraham and the three angels visiting him at the oak of Mambre. But what would a heavenly messenger of *him*!

The moon was climbing up over the point of the pyramid and was shedding its soft light on the glittering sand all around; in another minute or two it was gliding down the western side of the pyramid, the point of which, in the shadow on the ground, was steadily nearing the feet of the still sentinel, and must soon shrink away beneath them, to leave revealed with daylight clearness the contour of the figure visible through the gauzy coat, and the colors of the interior attire.

Rahuel bent forward with intense anxiety. The moonlight beamed down bright on the visitor, and searchingly crept through the veils and the coat, and — disclosed the sad face of Zoroith, enshrouded in the priestly veil, and the beautiful oval of the head of Zoroith decorated with the priestly tiara!

She had been adopted by the chief hierophant of Thebes into the ranks of the "prophetesses," and had by this distinction obtained the privilege of visiting Neht-nefert's tomb, or any other tomb, at any hour of the day or the night.

Rahuel's mind was upset anew by the revelation. He was at a loss what to do. He could not carry her off before his mission at Thebes would be accomplished. He could not let her know that he had come up especially for the purpose of putting Ai-defa in bonds. She must never know that he was instrumental in the ruin of Ai-defa. He could not take her on the same bark with Ai-defa. Why had he at all gone out of the way of his task to satisfy his craving for a look at her!

And yet he was nearly maddened with the desire of coaxing her away, and hiding himself with her in some obscure corner of Chanaan, and loving her with all the flood of love that had accumulated in his heart during the past years of futile resistance against the only clear-tongued appeal of his soul for happiness! He would rush out from his hiding-place, and gather her into his arms, and leave it to a kindly fate to obliterate the memory of the dark deeds of his past!

But while yet hesitating, he saw that she arose, crossed the door of the chapel, and was met and saluted by a man whom he recognized by his voice to be Nathan.

"You have tarried long," she said complainingly to Nathan. "I had already begun to fear that the incriminating document might fall into Rahuel's hands. Have you secured it?"

"Ay, sweet my love," Nathan simpered, and laid one hand affectionately on her shoulder with the evident design of encircling her neck, while with the other

he produced a scroll of parchment, wrapped and sealed. But she withdrew a step, and his hand fell from her shoulder at his side. He glowered at her with sudden wrath, and growled at her:

"Zoroith, this torment must come to an end. I have betrayed a tribesman and a friend in order to win your favor, staking my life on an ace of a chance to win. If Hakar discovers the loss of this paper which is of utmost importance to him at this turn of events, I shall have to slink into a hole in the earth to escape the gallows. Rahuel could have obtained it for the price of a gesture; but I had to risk my head in procuring it. Had I not had to undertake a short excursion to neighboring friends, I should have handed this death warrant of Ai-defa to you the day before yesterday. It was then that I abstracted it, and having yesterday met Rahuel, and having been importuned by him for the delivery of it into his hands for the destruction of Ai-defa, I have withheld it from him, and have given him only the promise of securing it for him — on condition that he lend me his aid in securing *you!*"

He made another advance towards her, but was again repulsed, and with more decision.

"Peace!" she warned him, simply raising a hand in fending his approach.

"*Peace!*" echoed Rahuel with a hiss of ungovernable fury that nearly betrayed his presence; but the scuffle ensuing between the maddened lover outside and the imperturbable woman, absorbed the sound of his voice.

Zoroith never uttered a word. Her breath flew in short, laboring gasps from the heated contest with her enraged assailant, her bosom heaved with anxiety

at the danger of being discovered, by the nocturnal patrol of the cemetery, mixed in a hand to hand fight with a man; her veil, tiara, and coat were torn away and trampled into the sand by the infuriated suitor who had thrown aside the scroll so as to gain the free use of both his hands. But she so nimbly eluded his clutches, and so attentively watched for a mistake in his tactics, that Rahuel held his breath with admiration of her skill and self-possession.

The moment of the mistake came and was seized in the passing of a breath. Nathan opened both arms wide and bent his body back preparing for a leap and rush that was to crush her. But she slipped a slender hand into her cincture, and when he leaped at her, whipped out a dagger, and with a jerk shaking off its scabbard, met him at the point of the unflinching weapon. He saw the flash, but being unable to recede, plunged forward into the gleaming blade.

In his fall he drew her down with him, as she would not take her hand from the precious hilt. But she soon withdrew the dagger, a mere poniard for slenderness, and wiping it in the sand, picked up the discarded scabbard and put her trusty defender back in its secret hiding-place. Then she gathered up her scattered articles of wearing apparel, shook the sand from them, and put them on, each in its order, and at last looked about for the scroll. At her still assailant she never deigned to cast another look. The daughter of Eophres commanded remarkable steadiness of sight, Rahuel thought, and remarkable coolness of head in so hot and perilous an encounter as that which she had just now most bravely terminated.

But the scroll was not to be found. It might have been stamped into the sand, and covered. But no.

Nathan, she had observed, had cast it behind himself, and had then steadily withdrawn from that spot in his advance upon her. Perhaps it had been tossed into the sepulchral chapel. She approached the door, stepped on the threshold, and, bending forward — was seized by Rahuel, the same moment that she discovered him with a gasp of terror.

He drew her into the chamber, pressing her arms tightly against her sides to stifle her temptation of again resorting to her faithful and obsequious steel. He was not afraid of a cut or stab from her, as he was protected against an accidental scratch by a light coat-of-mail. But he was afraid of the husky Nubian lancers lately commanded to do duty in the cemetery. He had already made the acquaintance of two of their kind at Neht-nefert's tomb, and had been deeply impressed with their views of military firmness and obedience. Several bands of them were continually patrolling this paradise of thieves, and it would not be well for anyone to fall into their hands in the night.

So Zoroith had to be kept quiet.

She was afraid of Rahuel. Since her mishap in the street of Memphis, he had never more spoken to her, nor sought her presence. But he had proved himself a noble guardian of her helpless girlhood during the early period of their wanderings in the strange new country. He had shared his last loaf of bread, and his last coat with her, without asking any favors but that she was pleased. But now he held both the life of Ai-defa and her own in his hands; for Nathan had stood high in the councils of the League, and had been an intimate friend of Hakar. So Hakar would leave no stone unturned to convict her of wanton

murder for revenge, if Rahuel should disclose what he had witnessed.

She trembled in his grasp, like a sparrow in the claws of a hawk. She ventured a half-hearted look into his face, anxious to read the warning of her approaching doom. But she was startled to behold those eyes beaming down upon her with a wistful tenderness. It was a grievous disappointment for her.

A frown of deathly hatred would have been more welcome than this ominous sympathy. She had been prepared to read her death sentence from his eyes, but was most sorely taken aback at dipping her gaze into so deep and complacent a lake of fire that smoldered and heaved in this love-maddened soul.

Thus they stood a long time in breathless silence, searching each other's thoughts, each afraid of breaking the spell, because each knew that a catastrophe was inevitable. Rahuel insensibly tightened his grasp so strongly that she grew paler with every breath. An unmistakable expression of physical pain, added to her mental suffering, overspread her white and small girlish face, of which hardly anything was distinguishable from the tint of her veil but her closed mouth, the rims of her dilated nostrils, and her glowing, troubled eyes.

"Zoroith," Rahuel groaned at length, "do you remember the shipwreck on the white reefs of the sea?"

She nodded slightly.

"And the man who snatched you from the jaws of death?"

Another slight nod for an answer.

"Who held his hand over your head and spread his coat over your shoulders when you were a castaway in a strange land?"

Now she rallied.

"And do you remember," she lisped, "that turn of the car of Pent-Amen?"

He was silent. The remorse for his lack of chivalry on that occasion; the remorse for the irretrievable loss sustained on that occasion through his lack of chivalry, was bending and turning his powerful frame and wrenching his arms and hands, so that he actually injured her. She cried with insufferable pain. But at that sign of his cruelty, he released her.

"Go away," he moaned, and stood aside from the entrance to let her pass out.

"Give me that paper," she begged.

He extracted Nathan's scroll from his bosom, and, turning away his face, handed it over without a word of objection. His hand trembled and shook so that the seal rattled against the parchment envelope. She accepted it with a quiet, courteous "Thank you," and a slight bow, and went out.

Rahuel sat down within the chapel on a low stone seat erected there for the repose of the pious visitors at the tomb, and buried his face in his hands, remaining still and motionless until he heard the hardy tread of the approaching night-patrol of the cemetery. At that sound he silently arose and descended the short flight of steps that led down to the vertical shaft of the mausoleum, which was at least twenty feet deep and terminated in the sepulchral chamber below, at the side of an elaborate sarcophagus. There was no provision, either by steps nor by any other means, of descending to the bottom.

But Rahuel had to avoid an encounter with the police and, therefore, was forced to conceal himself. So he sprang down, leaving it to luck and chance to rescue

him from the depths of this remote and silent sepulcher, from which he overheard the conjectures, threats, and execrations of the black watchmen above, and their footsteps, gliding over the floor of the chapel. They were searching for the murderer of Nathan, whose body they had instantly discovered. But Rahuel, knowing that he was safe from detection, threw himself on the lid of the stone casket, and closed his eyes. "Sleep, sleep," he murmured, "and oblivion!"





Chapter Forty-second

TREASON AND GLOOM

IN Memphis and Anu, and in the region of the Delta generally, signs of unrest and activity of a sort never before in evidence during the long reign of Apepi, were becoming manifest at all hands. A change was being wrought in the country from within its vitals. The alien element of the Hyksos was slowly segregated from the native residue of the subjugated owners of the country, like foam boiling up on the surface of a cauldron. An estrangement was superseding the hitherto tolerably sociable relations between the invaders and the natives.

None could trace the origin of this embarrassing transmutation to a definite source. There were powerful nomarchs at Xoïs and Sais who exhibited an inclination to disregard the supremacy of the pharaoh, and there were princes and priests at Anu who did not hesitate to question the prudence of the pharaoh's command to purge public worship from the multifarious superstitious accretions to the worship of Set, the god of the Hyksos. Also a torrent of the poison of unrest and insubordination was found to come rushing down from Thebes, the stronghold of the ancient royal and princely families. Other currents, less tainted with the poison of sedition, were traced back to the temple at Anu.

But these were running deeper, more quietly, and were carrying the scent of religion in a stream that issues directly from human hearts. The homage shown to Aseneth, that strange maid gifted from above with superhuman goodness and wisdom, had lured many minds from the worship of Ra, Horus, Hathor, and the other ancient deities of the land, and had reawakened in the Hyksos a desire of returning to the worship of Set, the god of their fathers, whereas the stolid natives were anxious not to neglect the old deities whose names and legends were sculptured and painted on a thousand temple walls, whose statues were placed on every altar, at every tomb, at the gates of every city and temple, and at the steps of the royal throne. They were not averse to bowing their heads to new deities, but they declined to discard the old.

Ra-Sekenen, the vassal king of Thebes, fervently championed the cause of the natives, and thus tightened his hold on the hearts of his countrymen all over the land. Now the breasts of the northern brethren, who had so far willingly submitted to the rule of the foreigners, were being opened to the persuasions of the southern compatriots who were plotting the expulsion and destruction of the foreign despots. Agitators of the patriotic cause were everywhere finding willing ears. Within a few weeks, the atmosphere around the throne of Apepi, and the atmosphere in which all the foreigners moved, was that of frigid isolation. The Hyksos looked up in amazement to find themselves, for the first time in more than two hundred years, to be strangers in Mizraim.

Putiphar, who not only served as the "Right Leg" of the king, but also had in secret by the envious courtiers been dubbed "the Golden Ear" of the pharaoh,

was falling into disfavor. Born of the native race, and fully cognizant of the radical change preparing in secret, and expectant of the dawn of a new and more promising era of national glory, he had insensibly subsided from his official zeal and activity into a state of expectancy and indecision.

Gradually also he had persuaded himself that, if the hen was to be driven from the nest, he might as well be the first to capture some of the eggs. He lent an ear to the whisperings of jealous or malignant denunciations, and thus made himself the tool — for a portion of the spoils — of the most dangerous enemies of the peace and security of the country. Large estates of both native and foreign princes were confiscated, and their owners driven out, only to swell the number of the malcontents at Thebes, and to supply them with an argument for rebellion which appealed to every one interested in the security of his own property.

The pharaoh had, through apprehension of the threatening storm, conjured up by himself, set his heart upon crushing the movement by force and violence. He was angered by the seeming ingratitude and unjustifiable lust of liberty of his subjects. But instead of calmly considering the source and weight of their claims with his councilors, he fostered his royal indignation, and resolved to vent it upon the exasperated race. Thus also the pharaoh had become a tool — the tool of his disloyal chancellor, as the chancellor had made himself the tool of shameless extortioners and intriguers.

P'tehebra, the doughty captain of the North, had made conciliatory presentations to the king, but in vain. His own son was confined in the chancellor's prison, and his prestige in the councils of the king had waned to insignificance.

Every word of warning from him was turned against him as a plea for the delivery of his son, although he had borne the terrible blow of his son's imprisonment without a word of protest. If Pent-Amen was guilty of treason, the prison was the only safe place to hold him. If he was innocent, his innocence would appear in the judgment before the Gate.

P'tehebra himself had through all the confusion and temptations of the times not faltered in his loyalty. He had valiantly borne the contempt and persecutions of the Leaguers, and had thus silently permitted them to sacrifice his son in place of himself who could not be won over to the cause of the rebels; for he was convinced that Pent-Amen had not broken his pledge of allegiance to the constituted monarch. He might have committed some indiscretion in the company of Ai-defa, who had in despair turned over almost his entire patrimony to the League in order to save his position and his head, but had then been disowned as a foreigner by his false friends, and had been thrown into prison as a traitor.

A short time before, the Arabs of the east had made an attack on the copper mines of Sina, routing the pharaonic army, driving out the officials and operators, and establishing themselves in the forts and the quarters of the administration as the new owners of that indispensable resource of Egypt's mineral wealth. An expedition of twenty-four thousand troops was sent out to recover the lost possessions, and P'tehebra was put at its head; not because he was high in the favor of the pharaoh, but because he was not of the Hyksos tribe, the various minor heads of which were lusting to make themselves independent, and to establish little kingdoms of their own.

Also, not all his warriors were natives of the soil. They consisted of ten thousand archers and ax-men from Punt under the sub-command of Metabil, the black prince who had once competed with Pent-Amen in the market of Memphis for the possession of Binyah, the Hittite; of ten thousand more of P'tehebra's own faithful warriors recruited partly from the Delta, and partly from the mountains of the Arabian desert on this side of the sea, and of four thousand Beduins, the tried and seasoned rovers of the Lybian desert.

When he arrived on the scene of action, P'tehebra was surprised to find that the Midianites had in secret destroyed all cisterns and wells, the most necessary support of human existence in the parched peninsula. Forthwith he turned upon them to chastise them for their treachery.

But they were prepared for his reprisals. Down their hills poured streams of living steel, and the gorges of their mountains spat forth a hurricane of arrows and javelins at the first hostile stroke. His army was thrown into confusion ere it was arrayed for battle, broken into fragments, and routed in all directions. The general alone and the black prince, surrounded by a small band of the desperate Beduins, pressed on against the terrific storm, pushing the enemy back inch by inch, in an effort to reach the heights and to recall their disheartened followers to battle.

They succeeded in gaining the crest of a peak from which orders had been carried along the line by couriers, and where the commander-in-chief was suspected to be stationed. Another terrific storm of clanging swords and clashing battleaxes, and the handful of opponents were thrown back upon a tent erected in the court of

the temple of Hathor, and the tent was thrown over and trampled under foot.

But after having disposed of the last obstinate Midianite, they found themselves standing face to face with — a woman. P'tehebra did not take time even to wonder at the outrageous discovery, but, uttering a weird laugh of scorn, plunged his sword into his own breast.

Metabil and a band of about a hundred Beduins made good their escape from the heights of "Bit Ka."¹ Their superstition had prompted them to consider the lone woman on the mountain top as an apparition of Hathor, and they had fled from her in terror.

On the coast of the gulf whither they retreated from the high battle-ground and where they wished to embark for their voyage north in order to reassemble their shattered forces, they met, seated in a royal bark, the neat and fleet "Hathor," a man of tall stature, an Arab, to all appearances, in Egyptian garb. He displayed on his fingers two royal seals, the badges of office in the government of the pharaoh. He exhibited, in addition, a cynical smile as his compliment to the defeated warriors, but otherwise held his peace.

Metabil would have enjoyed a sweep of his ax at the grinning face, had their predicament not been too bad to be complicated with a charge of felonious assault on a royal officer in the service of the treasury. Perhaps he was sent out to look after the provisioning of the expedition. But it was passing strange that he should trespass on the territory of the enemy without protection and disguise.

And lo, before they had made ready for sailing the

¹ The mines of *Sarabit el Hadem*.

various craft lying at anchor in the bay, they saw the weird figure of that woman coming down the mountain and seating herself at the side of the man! In a trice they had departed, sailing before the wind down the coast towards the land of the rebellious Arabs.

But the cries of the Midianites drawing near through the ravines in search of the dispersed bands of P'tehebra's army, diverted the attention of the fugitive warriors from the strange pair, and obliged them to line up for a new conflict. The Midianites swooped down upon them with might, but were thrown back and kept at bay until an Egyptian flotilla, hurrying from down the gulf, poured its archers on the sand, and assisted them in making it easy and quick work to dispose of their relentless assailants.

The camp of the Egyptian army which stretched along the oasis of Pharan, with all its stores of provisions and water, was not yet attacked by either enemy, that is, by the Midianites or the Arabs. The Arabs were intrenched in the wild region of the mines, and were well provided with drinking water which they had brought with them in thousands of bags loaded on donkeys and sledges. They had not stirred at the approach of P'tehebra's army; their sentinels had not even left their posts, or signaled to the main body. P'tehebra had suspected an ambush, and had cautiously stopped his progress, until he discovered the reason, as he thought, of the inactivity of the enemy in the destruction of the reservoirs.

By that time he had been considerably harassed by swarms of Midianite archers who had sallied forth in troops of a hundred each, well mounted on light-footed and spirited horses. Taking their challenge for a taunt directed at his anger over the ruined resources of the

peninsula, he threw his entire army upon them, following them in blind rage into the trap in the mountains.

Metabil convened the council of the captains. The remnants of the army consisted of about fifteen thousand disappointed men, not counting those who had been driven into the desert, or upon the camp of the Arabs, and had been made captives. But the Arabs numbered probably twenty thousand riders, and the Midianites were blowing the war trumpets from the tops of their hills and heights to gather as many more. If Metabil could only understand how it was arranged that the Midianites were fighting the battles of their hostile neighbors who were old rivals against them with the Egyptians for the possession of the wealthy mines of Sina!

"There is treason in the air," one of the captains boldly cried at the black general. "The Midianites are stretching out a longing hand after Sina! When our small garrison at the mines was captured by the Arabs, and the victors left only a small body of troops in their place, the Midianites conquered them and destroyed the wells. To prove my assertion, I will produce the traitor!"

He left the assembly of the captains, and returned after a short pause with a man whom he was pushing ahead of himself by the neck.

The man ushered in among the stern warriors of the pharaoh was pale at the margin of the lips and at the rim of the nostrils, and at the temples in front of the ears. For the rest, his muddy complexion did not admit of paling. He was terror-stricken, and moved only as far as he was pushed, reluctantly planting his feet ahead, and acting generally like an ox smelling the blood of the slaughter house.

"Here is the man," the captain said, throwing his captive headlong at the feet of the chief.

"Your name!" Metabil demanded sharply.

"Ben-Eder," the poor sinner faltered, raising himself on his knees.

"What is your connection with this cause of the Midianites?"

"None, none, great captain of Apepi!" he whimpered.

"I am only the messenger of Rahuel!"

Rahuel? Yes; Metabil had heard of Rahuel from Putiphar. If Rahuel was the companion of that specter woman there was no doubt of Rahuel's complicity.

"Who was that woman at the mountain top?"

"Zoroith. But she is insane! She is innocent. She was carried to the heights by Rahuel."

"Now, on your life, answer me! Why were the wells filled up, and the reservoirs broached?"

"I will tell you all if you promise me that you will spare my life!"

"Your life is not worth taking!" Metabil cried angrily, but added broadly: "I pledge my sword that you shall safely leave this camp!"

Ben-Eder crawled to the feet of Metabil, and touched the black man's sword to his forehead. Then he rose to his feet, and made his confession, having in view the immense wealth stored away in the caves of the mountain colony of the desert, and the several scores of souls who would fall to his prey if Rahuel could be removed from competition. He could hoodwink or despatch the two tribesmen who were the guardians of the treasure. And then Zoroith would have to fly to him for refuge.

"The reports of domestic quarrels in Egypt," he said deliberately, "were carried to the Arabs by Rahuel.

He advised them to lay a hand on the peninsula, as the pharaoh, he said, is contending against his own household. But when the Arabs had annexed the mines, he sent me to the Midianites to carry them message that they should destroy the reservoirs in order to make contention between the pharaoh and the Arabs impossible for lack of water, and in order to wrest from the Arabs their new conquest. He knew that P'tehebra was to lead the Egyptian warriors, and he was anxious to destroy P'tehebra, because P'tehebra flogged Rahuel some years ago."

The captains were silent a long while at the iniquitous disclosure. At length Metabil resumed: "What had the woman to do with the treason?"

"Zoroith is a deposed prophetess, and had to accept Rahuel's services to escape greater trouble. She is the daughter of Eophres, the sheik who was drowned at the reefs."

"Why is she deposed?"

"She has blood on her hands!"

"It is well, slave! Whither has Rahuel repaired with the woman?"

"I do not know — upon my head! Rahuel is master of both the River and the Sea, and lords it over the Arabs and the Midianites as well as over the Egyptians."

"It is well — it is well!" Metabil exclaimed in astonishment at the audacity of Rahuel, a foreigner who had dared to push his operations into the very palace of the king. "Go your way, knave; but have a care of your course!"

It was decided that the camp should be moved farther north on account of the scarcity of water, and that meanwhile a request for assistance from home should be sent to Memphis. By the time, however,

that the messengers of Metabil arrived at the capital, the news of the disastrous encounter had already been received by the king. When Metabil's envoy returned with sealed orders instead of an army or a promise of an army, there was consternation in the camp. The orders read that the campaign against the Arabs was to be abandoned for the present, and "whatever might be left of the *Glory of the pharaoh*" — a gruesome intimation of the pharaoh's displeasure — "should be withdrawn in order to join an expedition into Thebes." For Thebes is up in arms against the "Double High House," the orders concluded.

Hence the long-threatened rebellion of the Thebans had broken out.

It was disheartening news. Metabil's army was crestfallen. They were obliged to return through their own territory to Memphis with furled and covered standards as a public acknowledgment of their defeat, and with muffled drums and stuffed trumpets, like a funeral procession. And in this season of trouble, neither chancellor nor king would lend them an ear to receive the tale of treachery they had to tell of the artful Hebrew. But they broke camp and moved on, treasuring their revenge with the hope of redeeming their colors at Thebes, and of flinging them defiantly on their return from victory into the traitor's face.





Chapter Forty-third

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

MUCH as he revolted at the necessity, Rahuel was bound for the nondescript colony in the stony desert. He should have been at Thebes. But Putiphar had not fulfilled his promise of sending him the seal of the *Mer-Medaiu*, because that being the badge of a military office, it rested with the king in person to grant it. Now the king had refused to admit the crafty foreigner into the exclusive and privileged ranks of the military, notwithstanding the "Right Leg's" hearty endorsement and recommendation. And for this rebuff the king and his military had recently been made to suffer defeat at the hands of the Midianites.

Events were fast multiplying in Egypt with an unmistakable tendency towards the dissolution of the Hyksos domination. The country was rich in spoils, and Rahuel would fill his hands with the good things of Mizraim ere he would leave the country. In times of war and sedition, the attention of men was fixed rather on their arms and chariots than on their chests of treasure. Public vigilance was relaxed, as every citizen felt bound to act as private custodian both of his own interests and of those of the country at large. But where everyone constitutes himself a watchman, there is the paradise of thieves. Rahuel was quick

to improve so handy an opportunity of profiting by the divided vigilance of the arduous rebels.

The pharaoh had sent an embassy to Ra-Sekenen, the vassal king of Thebes, commanding him to put away out of the temple the statues of all their gods (except those of Amen-Ra), not sparing those of the two Horuses, that is, both that of the Hor-em-chu (Horus in the Rising), and that of the Hor-pa-krat (Horus the Child), and to replace them with the statue of the only and true god of the Asiatics, the Set of the Hittites. Ra-Sekenen, in concert with the priests, had declined to entertain the orders of Apepi, and Apepi's ambassadors had left them with the muttering thunder of war over their heads.

Ra-Sekenen next refused to send the tribute of Thebes to Memphis. The local collector of the king's tithes was driven out, the royal storehouses were ransacked and destroyed, and the spoils were transferred to the temple granaries and the treasury of Horus. They were sacred property now, and it would have been tantamount to sacrilege for the king to demand them from the hands of the "Sem," the primate of all the priests in the land of *Kemi*.

The pharaoh had become so much disturbed over the restlessness of his northern governors and over the uncertainty of the course of the Thebans, and of their immediate designs, that he resolved to bring matters to a head by subjecting both the loyalty of the North and the strength and solidity of the southern disaffected province to a crucial test. He followed up his rejected command for a change in gods by a demand to stop and cut off the canal at Thebes, which tapped the Nile for a copious flow over verdant vineyards and smiling fields.

Had Ra-Sekenen wished to comply with the order, he would have laid waste a large tract of fertile land and condemned it to be turned into a bleak and barren desert. He convoked a council of his mighty chiefs, his captains, and expert guides, and communicated the proposal to them for obtaining their views and for contriving a means of avoiding an uprising of his own exasperated subjects, without provoking the anger of Apepi.

But his advisers were silent in great dismay, and knew not how to answer him good or ill.¹ Then the king repeated his demand for the quarterly tithes, and the result was war.

Rahuel had been the distant witness of this prelude to the storm. He had been rescued from the shaft of the tomb by Zoroith after several days of famishing that had brought him to the verge of death. She had then held the balance of his earthly life, and could have let him starve to death in the dark and solitary chamber deep down in the ground. It was impossible for him to invoke any help but hers, because, if discovered in a tomb, he would have been at once identified with the execrated fraternity of the grave-robbers, and would have been hanged without trial. But she discovered him on a chance visit to the silent chapel in the shadow of that stately little pyramid where she had taken Nathan's life, and supplied him with a rope on which he climbed out of his musty and mute prison.

By this charity she had sacrificed her own immunity from annoyance and suspicion for the killing of the favorite spy of the chiefs. She had on that occasion dropped her dagger from her cincture. When it was picked up by a patrol of the cemetery, it was found that on its

¹ See Rawlinson: *Ancient Egypt*, vol. II, p. 109.

sheath was chased the name of Nathan; for he himself had given it to her to use in warding off the impertinences, as he called the attempts at reconciliation, of Ai-defa. The long and narrow blade was the only one within reach of the investigating police to fit into the heart wound of the murdered man.

She was brought before the highpriest, divested of her priestly insignia, deposed from her office of prophetess, and was bidden to leave the country. Hakar made it his especial task to lead her to the bank of the river and to put her on board a freighter which was bound for the country of the Arabs with a cargo of ill-smelling hides sent down from Nubia across the desert; and Rahuel was not over-anxious to pose as her defender at her present precipitate lapse into disrepute. But he rediscovered her on his errand of treason into the camp of the Arabs, where she had taken refuge under the guise of a silent imbecile; mainly, perhaps, for the purpose of keeping another of her former admirers at a distance, whom she encountered among her tribesmen, Ben-Eder, the messenger of Rahuel to Midian.

The removal of Zoroith from the scene of Rahuel's activity made it less difficult for him to put Ai-defa and Pent-Amen under arrest and to transport them to the prison of Putiphar. Hakar proved himself a valuable instrument in securing the consent of Ra-Sekenen for the removal of two of the highest officials of Apepi from the insecure city without compromising the position of Rahuel who was likewise in the employ of the fanatical pharaoh through the agency of the chancellor.

Rahuel was toying with the lots of fate. His relations with Putiphar had suffered no other change than

that they had become more intimate in so far as the chancellor himself was receding from the straight path of honesty and justice. He allowed himself to be led into ways in which Rahuel had always been at home — the way of refusing to bear the check of responsibility to either God or man. Throughout his three years of insidious sowing and fomenting of discontent in various parts of the country, Rahuel had contrived to retain both the seals of the king; not only that which accredited him as an honorary steward to the royal board, but also that which elevated him to the enviable position of a dignitary of the palace and a royal counselor, and empowered him to stamp the name of Apepi on any official documents he might issue within the competency of his position.

This large range of liberty had enabled him to go and come at his own leisure and pleasure, to act both as the agent of the government and as the private agent of the chancellor, and had opened for him innumerable avenues of acquiring large portions of the tolls which accrued to the royal treasury from the liquidation of the estates of suspected or slandered sympathizers with the brewing rebellion.

The colony in the mountains of Arabia had been enriched beyond its capacity as well for wealth as for exaltation in its custodians. Omri and Zambri had introduced a standard of living wholly in accordance with their crude tastes. They procured regular shipments of wine, and the luxuries of rich garments; the best quality of linen cloths for their spreading huts and tents; a variety and quantity of arms of bronze and ebony to tempt the jealousy of a king; and affected an ease and comfort of which they only knew by reputation that it was the privilege of palaces and Courts.

Their habits of cleanliness, however, had not grown apace with the progress of affected luxury and leisure. The women remained ignorant of the healthful luxury of a bath, and the children felt best at ease when the cool air of the hillside could gain direct access to the cutaneous garb provided by mother nature, through wide-gaping rents, or such other openings as were readily provided by robes skilfully aired and disordered in an expert and incessant campaign against the infesting pest of diminutive but none the less exacting participants in the joys of thriving on a fat and festive board.

It was a healthy and promising brood that was bred there in the solitude and seclusion of the mountains, and, to a higher degree, of the atmosphere of a narrow, tribal solidarity. For there were bred in them arrogance and self-esteem of such dimensions as to fit them for reckless rivalry with those of the cultured world, whose lot it should be to walk and cope with them in the future in open competition for the fruits of human genius and human toil, although they were unfit for the fellowship of the cultured.

Rahuel's visits were not frequent. At his command was the "Hathor," a vessel fully capable of carrying a moderate cargo of estates reduced to golden rings, and packed in cases and bags of modest size and unattractive exterior. His two oarsmen and the skipper at the tiller were well paid and well fed, and had reason neither for discontent, nor, in consequence, for sharp-eyed suspicion. They were men of the western region of the marshy Delta, where, for centuries, nations had mixed with the easy indifference of the feathered tribe of the coop, and where racial traits were extinguished, and the cultivation of new national traits was neglected.

The product of such a manifold and careless mixture of blood had neither the covetousness of the Asiatic for wealth, nor the love of the Egyptian for labor and luxury; it was neutral, not only in nationality, but also in ambitions and aspirations. Traitors could be bred of such stock in countless numbers; but patriots, none — and Rahuel had learned the lesson of Egypt to his profit.

From time to time he would run down the River into the Great Sea,¹ or, skirting Anu, would enter the Red Sea by the old canal. Such occasional excursions were undertaken either for pleasure or for study. The route of his business voyages lay along the canal of Anu which connected the Nile inland with the Red Sea, and which was the main channel of the military operations directed against the constantly threatening invasions from Asia.

On one of his pleasure trips he rediscovered Zoroith. He had repeatedly made overtures to Saleph, the sheik of the northern Arabs in the place of his father Eophres, to enlist his services in the search for the lost woman. But Saleph had ridiculed the story of his sister as told by her ardent suitor. "She was drowned," he would conclude every argument about her whereabouts, "and the dead do not return."

But on one of his voyages Rahuel found her in the tent of Saleph. She had wandered in of her own accord, footsore and way-worn, but had met no welcome. Her white hair curling loosely about her head, in contrast with her youthful, specter-white face and dark, glowing eyes and ruddy lips, and her figure garbed from head to foot in the choicest linen of a mellow, golden-toned crimson hue, in addition to her absolute silence and the quiet of her every move, made her out to be a

¹ The Mediterranean.

spirit returned from the nether world, despite the vehement and persistent asseverations of her brother, that "the dead do not return."

None dared to touch her, and everyone shrank from her advance. She ate and drank simply, modestly, and with exceeding moderation. She even slept like other mortals among whom she had taken up her abode; but as no one had the courage to ask her a question, she had the courage to remain dumb.

When Rahuel asked her to return with him to Egypt, there was none that was not glad to be so easily rid of her, and she herself was so ready to assent, that she might have been expecting the visit and the invitation of her unabashed wooer. But even towards Rahuel she preserved her inviolable silence. She followed him everywhere so closely that she had come to be called in jest "his red shadow"; she had climbed the mountains of the Mafkat with him at his command, and was now patiently sailing up the Red Sea with him, ignorant of and unconcerned about his further designs with her.

Rahuel adored her regardless of her stolidity and mental abstraction, which were so pronouncedly assuming the traits of either rapture or madness, that some wondered at Rahuel for his courage, and others, for his jealousy and mad infatuation.

But yet her mind was more active than ever. There was graven in the corners of her eyes, at the pink base of her nostrils, and in the dimple beneath the base of her nose produced by the unchanging pout of her lips, a deeply observant lurking that flashed and flitted about her face as an anticipation of a triumph deferred, but infallibly secure.

Rahuel passed part of the territory of the Arabs

unchallenged, and sailed across the sea towards a point on the western shore where a well-worn path led up to the secreted colony, which was located nearly midway in the mountains between the sea and the river. His serenity and gloating perceptibly changed to restlessness and gloom, the nearer they approached the landing. But he could no longer trust the safety of Zoroith to her own tribesmen. His trickery practised against their interests in Sina was not yet revealed to them. They would learn of it as soon as they should try to come to an understanding with the Midianites about their claims on the territory of the mines; for such an understanding would be reached only on the battlefield, as the Midianites had not fought the Egyptians out of sympathy for the Arabs.

At all events, Zoroith must be set aside a little while longer, until he could engineer the expedition against Thebes.

But Zoroith most ungraciously refused to be set aside. One glance at the lusty brood of that dirty nest in the mountains sufficed to fill her with rebellion. She did not voice her disgust in words or wailing; but she turned away from the scene with a significant sneer, and would not be held back.

Rahuel conducted her into the caves where all their hoard was piled up, with a view to inducing her through covetousness to change her mind. He opened and spread out before her sight such a large store of golden and silver jewels, of costly, fragrant raiment, and of curiously and quaintly wrought articles stolen from the tombs of the great, such as vases, masks, breast-plates, statuettes, symbolical beetles of grotesque form and size, of solid silver and gold, and armlets, bracelets, and anklets, ear rings, and finger rings, that for an

instant she suffered herself to be captivated by the glow and glitter of the immense wealth.

"All this will I give you," Rahuel urged her, "if you will here await my return!"

But she turned her head away from him, and brushed aside his hands which were ready to clasp her, and to draw her to his breast. She left the cave, and when he followed her out, angry and confused, she pointed a rigid hand in the direction of the Nile.

Rahuel realized that he could not return on the "Hathor" through the region of fresh hostilities which he himself had caused. So he sent orders to his crew to beach the craft, and to construct a litter wherein to convey Zoroith to the banks of the Nile. He himself would condescend to act in the company of his servants as a porter for Zoroith. But before they left the mountain caves where Zoroith spent the short hours of waiting, he insisted that she should complete her wardrobe from the abundance at her service, and transform herself into a woman of estate and pretensions.

Zoroith passively complied with his directions, tricking herself out with resplendent raiment. Accidentally she put on the girdle of Neht-nefert which Nathan had "procured," in his own clever way, from the offerings deposited at the tomb of the girl. Neither Rahuel nor Zoroith suspected the significance of that article of dress, and thus unwittingly carried it abroad as a badge of the professional thieves of the cemetery.

The officials of the cemetery, and the priests who had presided at the funeral ceremonies, and part of whose functions it was to inspect and to exorcise the garments of the dead, could not but recognize this costly cincture brought to their notice in connection

with the sad death of so beloved and important a little personage as the daughter of the governor of the North.

Rahuel, however, was proud of the magnificent array of the idolized woman, much after the fashion of a child dandling a gaudy doll, and in high spirits proceeded on the journey that he had vouched should be undertaken for the achievement of his schemes. He could put Zoroith in charge of Binyah, he calculated, until he should have finished his task at Thebes, and should return then to claim her as his rightful booty.

He missed the sprightly "Hathor" when they arrived at the public ferry, but consoled himself with the consideration that the "Hathor" was placed in a good position to assist him on the other side in his ultimate departure. It would be easy enough to remove the less valuable goods by donkey train on land; but the precious hoard of gold should be ferried across the sea under his personal supervision.

Therefore, his course being laid out for putting in safety the wages of his manifold labors, he crossed the Nile, and, after landing on the western bank, hurried towards Memphis in a mood of continued elation.

At the capital he consigned Zoroith to the care of Binyah, who at sight of him broke into weeping and implored him to use his influence with Putiphar for the liberation of her husband. "He is suffering innocently," she pleaded. "He is the victim of an intrigue. Deliver him, Rahuel, and I will give you his armor and arms for a reward!" Then turning to Zoroith, and embracing her, she said sympathetically: "You have borne so great a burden of misfortunes that you should have been spared the disgrace of having Ai-defa sentenced to die by the rope for high treason!"

Zoroith questioningly raised her head with a jerk, and her face grew a shade whiter. But she remained silent, save for the momentary gritting of her teeth, and a slight hiss in her throat. Her eyes were riveted on that spot of Rahuel's breast beneath which was pulsing his covetous heart. But she fished in vain for a dagger in the girdle of Neht-nefert, which had not been designed as a hiding place of murder, but rather as a mere adornment for a harmless girl.

Rahuel promised Binyah that he would run the length of importunity with Putiphar to have her prayer granted, but made haste to escape from the laments of the frantic woman. "The gallows," he growled, as he hurried through the vestibule of the house which he had robbed of its happiness, "the gallows, or the ax, for the son of P'tehebra, and then away with you, Rahuel! It is sweeter to love than to be revenged!"

On his way to Putiphar's mansion he was meeting military officers at every turn. They did not know him, and he was little concerned in them and their talk. But at the crossway where, some years before, Zoroith had been run down by Pent-Amen's car, and where he had heartlessly abandoned her to her fate, he was startled to see Samma standing in the midst of a group of officers, and disputing with them. He was probably drunk as usual, and had little control of his tongue. "Raca-el?" he heard him say, as he passed. "Raca-el — if you mean *Rahuel* — *him* I know!"

"Ay, ay!" the men pressed him. "Raca-el, or Rahuel — it is the same! He is the traitor!"

"Rahuel, the fool!" Samma ejaculated savagely — and Rahuel fled.





Chapter Forty-fourth

IN TOILS AND TROUBLE

BINYAH was much disturbed over the condition of her unfortunate friend, for Zoroith continued as reticent during her stay as she had been on entering Pent-Amen's house. She listened attentively to Binyah's recital of Pent-Amen's and Ai-defa's ill luck, frequent though it was, and inconsistent with what she herself knew to be the truth. Both the butler and the baker of the pharaoh had fallen victims to Rahuel's intrigues; the butler, because he was P'tehebra's son, and the baker, principally because he was Zoroith's husband. She had already been removed from Thebes when the twain officials were put in bonds, but she had gathered it from Rahuel's speech, actions and aims, that it was he who had accomplished their ruin.

The sorrowing and grieving of Binyah went to her heart. The affectionate, passionate young wife, neglectful of her appearance, of her surroundings, and even of her pride in the cleanness of her home, over her one and only care, the injustice done to her lord, was an eloquent reminder for Zoroith of the happiness she herself might enjoy, had it not been for the brutal disregard of the one, and for the savage distrust of the other of the two men who had lured the sacred flame of love from her confiding soul. Of the two, she hated Rahuel the more.

With the true instinct of woman she had known from the first that Rahuel loved her, and that he neglected her only for a time because he thought he could woo and win her at any time he might choose, after satisfying his baser passion for revenge; and she had revolted at the idea of being held off at arm's length only to be admitted to the favor of her lover at his own bidding, like a beggar admitted to the crumbs after the feast. She had afterwards pledged her fidelity to Ai-defa, more from pride of being loved than from the impulse of loving. But she had pledged herself, and she would remain faithful to her vow.

Binyah was happy despite her grief. Her suffering was hallowed, and her sorrow was sweetened by affection. Zoroith thought that she, too, could be happy, even if Ai-defa or Rahuel should be hanging on the gallows, if only the one or the other were innocently condemned, and were noble enough of soul to be worthy of compassion. She envied Binyah for the opportunity of besprinkling her love with her tears, and of sinking it deeper in a heart softened with suffering.

One day Binyah asked her company for a visit to the mansion of Putiphar. The chancellor had been so busy these latter weeks supervising the equipping of the army for the campaign in the Theban province, that he had constantly refused to admit the lamenting Binyah to an audience. But now the army was on the march, and Putiphar enjoyed a pause of rest. *He* might think that there were higher interests in the world to trouble about than the imprisonment of the discredited butler, but Binyah was sure she could convince him of the error of his views.

Zoroith remained in the court of the mansion while Binyah carried her grievance to the great "Right Leg"

of the king. In the rear of the court, cast in the shadow of the taller buildings of the palace and the storehouses, loomed the huge bronze-coated gates of the chancellor's prison. The building was low, rising only one squat story above the ground, but its foundations were sunk in rock thirty feet beneath the surface, so that the total interior height of the silent tomb of the living was all of forty or fifty feet, rising out of a square pit of the foundation walls. The many small buildings crowded at all angles about the main structure were the quarters of the prison administration, dwellings, magazines, chambers of discipline for unruly inmates, or of torture and execution by the whip or the ax.

Altogether, the aspect of the grim house of justice was as quietly and emphatically deterrent of levity as its purpose required, and Zoroith felt her skin creep up her arms at the reflection that Ai-defa had now been confined in that dungeon nearly four years; for Ai-defa had naturally been given to be merry and frivolous. She would not grieve much, she imagined, if she knew Rahuel to be chained to the wall at the bottom of that lonely pit.

Binyah was not long in returning from her errand. Putiphar had shown her exceptional favor by listening patiently to her appeal, and when she inadvertently concluded her pleading with the intimation that she would next approach the pharaoh in person as soon as he should return from the war, Putiphar was enlivened with kindness, and graciously acceded to her desire so that he offered to conduct her immediately to the prison, and to grant her an interview with her beloved husband. Binyah's eloquence was considerably enhanced by her personal grace and the impetuosity of her affection, which was so abundantly in evidence

that the jovial "Right Leg" persuaded himself some of it was splashing in his direction.

Zoroith was asked whether or no she would wish to take part in the interview. But she declined impassively, keeping her eyes expectantly fixed on the entrance of the court. She did not stir from her seat at a safe distance from the threatening gates. Putiphar lightly shook the tails of his yellow, crimson-striped headdress out of his neck, and observed with an affected youthful snicker: "Daft, poor girl. It is a pity. Ai-defā is not worth such a sacrifice of bliss as she is making!" And he pinched Binyah's arm; but Binyah stubbed him in the shin with one of her sandaled feet, as if by accident, and withdrew her arm from his grasp.

At the gate Putiphar rapped a loud and boisterous gong, and the jailer appeared, keys in hand, and his heart on his tongue.

"Of course, of course," he ejaculated at hearing his master's orders; "of course — Pent-Amen! A lamb among these jackals!" And he hurried away casting back a sidelong look of admiration at the beautiful Binyah.

But the coveted grace was for the present to be denied the hungry woman. While she was waiting in the chamber of the chief warden with throbbing heart, suddenly Zoroith came fluttering in, and a loud altercation was heard approaching the gate. Zoroith bent her lips to Binyah's ear and whispered with the hot breath of ungovernable delight:

"Rahuel!"

Rahuel was wrangling and wrestling with a band of guards who were striving with might and main to bring him in without using undue violence. His hands were slipped through a wooden shackle and tied at the wrists

in front of his breast; and a rope was passed through his elbows behind his back to prevent his arms from dropping. But with his feet he kicked at his conductors, and strained at the rope about his neck, and spat out streams of verbal abuse. The nearer they managed to drag him to the gates, which parted at his approach with scornful slowness, the more unmanageably he exerted his titanic strength and fury.

At length they pushed him bodily through the gate, and plied the end of the rope, by which he was drawn, on his bare back. At this insult he leaped into the air like a viper out of fire, and hissed and snarled inarticulate profanity. But with the assistance of the expert and more practical keepers he was at last thrust into a stone cell above ground, the iron door of which was snapped on him without further ceremony.

Putiphar had nimbly stepped aside when Rahuel was dragged into the warden's chamber, and had remained in hiding until he had heard the snap and click of the cell door. Now he again stepped in among the frightened women and the dumb jailers, and vented his mingled surprise, relief, and confusion with a vocal explosion, half sigh and half yell. At all events, there was no mistaking its coming from the bottom of his heart. The capture and imprisonment of his erstwhile confidant must have removed an enormous weight of apprehension from his breast, without, however, relieving him entirely of his doubts as to the outcome of the legal prosecution of the traitor. His own conscience was not clear; Rahuel had been implicated in too many shady transactions which were engineered by Putiphar, not to become a dangerous accuser under necessity. But he would take care to have the man sentenced by the pharaoh so as to avoid the formality of a hearing.



He said nothing, but retired, leaving the warden to proceed with arranging the promised interview between Binyah and Pent-Amen.

Zoroith left the place before the imprisoned steward was ushered into the presence of his overjoyed wife, and went out to wander about the quiet city. The departure of the king with the ten thousand warriors, the passing of Metabil with the remnants of the defeated army of Sina, and the universal apprehension of a stricter enforcement of the law against those suspected of sympathy with the cause of the Thebans — and there were thousands who felt themselves guilty — had silenced the noise of the capital, and had scared life away from public places.

But the lone wanderer in the deserted streets was barely aware of the unusual quiet. She had herself become so calm with satisfaction at the feat accomplished, that the harmony of the quiet city with her own calm mood was too soothing to be noticed as unusual. She walked along briskly, down towards the river. She stopped a little while at the spot where she had met with that fateful accident some seven years ago, and interestedly inspected the surroundings, until she saw a big, loose-jointed, burly fellow arise behind a hedge of vines and fig trees opposite her side of the street, and, rubbing his eyes repeatedly, bend forward and stare at her through the parted branches with bulging eyes, his mouth wide open, and his tongue lolling like the tongue of a scandalized puppy. She was a little irritated at the impudence of the stupid observer, and proceeded on her way a long distance before she looked back. She was too proud to show any interest in his doings.

But when she did look back, prompted rather by

dread than curiosity, she saw him following her at a distance of a city square, lumbering along with heavy, unsteady gait, much after the manner of a huge earthen pot being moved forward on its legs by being turned from the one upon the other in slow alternation. She quickened her pace, and hastened on without another turn of her head.

At the dock of the main ferry she singled out from a boisterous crowd of boatmen one who was marked by lacking one eye. He stepped up to her, closely, and followed her apart. In the shadow of a shed, whither she had withdrawn, she counted upon his hand twelve small rings of gold. "You have your reward," she said quickly. "Now forget who hired and paid you! He is locked up in the dungeon!"

The ferryman laughed impudently as he replied: "If you have any more of that sort of friends of yours to catch and hand over to Putiphar, count on me for quick delivery!"

Returning from the river, she held towards the narrow, shady, and secluded side streets in order to avoid meeting her unknown admirer. But he was nowhere about. He might have joined the idle sailors while she had paid her agent at the shed. But she cared little what might have become of him, so long as she would not be obliged to meet him again.

The long, arborescent lane into which she turned was empty. A few cats and dogs were amusing themselves at a noisy game of hide-and-seek in the shrubbery, where it was worth a good deal of comfort to the cat to insist upon the hiding rôle of the play; but of human presence, not even a shadow was in evidence. The houses on both sides were built close to the sides of the interminable length of the arbor, the dwellings of

laborers in the fields and of their overseers. The adult population was at work, the children were at school, and only the aged were seated behind the dense hedges at the sides of the entrances, dandling the hopeful progeny of useless innocents on their knees, and quaffing a bowl of date wine, or munching dried figs, or doing the one and the other alternately, with the characteristic perseverance and leisure of the old.

At the passing of Zoroith they looked up, stopped in mild surprise both the rocking of the crooning young and the chewing of their savory and juicy sops, and craned their necks after her without rising. "The queen?" the little ones inquired breathlessly. "Ay, the queen; the queen of the gods!" some of their superstitious custodians responded, adding the lavishness of their tried good-will and reverence to the wonder of the children.

Some of the many leafy doors were vacant, and out of one of them, far up the lane, stepped the man who had watched and followed Zoroith. He planted himself broadly in the narrow way, and to make sure of his capture, set his legs far apart and stretched out his long arms so as to touch the arbor on both sides with hands and feet.

"Are you Aseneth?" he gasped diffidently, but with evident determination to solve a serious doubt.

"Who are you that you dare to hold up a woman on the highway?" Zoroith countered angrily, seeing that she was dealing with a dolt.

"I am Samma," he answered obediently; "Samma, the Hebrew, the brother of Rahuel. But are you Aseneth? I was at Anu until within a month ago, and I saw you from afar, but you did not see me. You looked very pretty to me on your flower car. I craved

the favor of kissing your foot, but your jealous attendants cuffed my ears and threw me into the mud of the street. Don't you remember the incident?"

"I am not Aseneth, my friend; but come with me; I will tell you of Aseneth!"

Samma was nothing if not humble and docile. He withdrew his barriers and let Zoroith pass him. Then he clung to her steps like a dog until she had led him to Pent-Amen's mansion and had presented him before Binyah.

Before nightfall, she had related to him all that she knew of Aseneth, and had also painted to him a glowing picture of the wealth and ease to be found in the lonely colony across the sea. She would save him from being drawn into the judgment and the punishment of his doomed tribesman. It would be a needless sacrifice of a harmless life to have him taken up as a friend and accomplice of the traitor. For he would surely be sacrificed, as the authorities had nursed a most indiscriminate tenderness for the very shadow of treason. The next morning, Samma was sailing a light papyrus boat across the placid face of Hhapi, the father of the gods, directly bound for the colony in the desert of the maritime Arabs.





Chapter Forty-fifth

JUDGMENT

THE pharaoh returned with a victorious army. The conquest of the territory of Thebes and the dispersion of the rebellious Thebans was not a moral victory, as the king well knew; but it was a victory, even though gained over dissatisfied brethren. Such a victory must be followed up by repressive measures, and by a process of clearing out at home the sympathy with the conquered.

After the warriors were paid, each a liberal sum out of the abundant wealth wrested from the "enemy," and the army was for the most part disbanded, excepting, of course, the garrison of six thousand quartered in Thebes, the king gathered about himself his chief captains, and went up to the northern province to lead in person a new army against Midian and the Arabs for the recovery of the copper mines of Sina. It would be a stroke of generalship, he thought, to take the backbone out of the rebellion in Xoïs and the other disquieted northern nomes by calling out all the men able and willing to bear arms, and to offer their inflamed spirits an opportunity to vent and spend themselves in an active and progressive campaign.

The presence of the pharaoh in the midst of his soldiers should inspire them with confidence and the desire to distinguish themselves by deeds of valor

which would pass unnoticed, as a matter of course, under the eyes of an ordinary general. Moreover, the most restless groups could be stationed at the mines as at a post of especial trust after the war, if it were successful — of which event there was not a doubt in the mind of the victorious Apepi.

The preparations for the excursion into the treacherous territory of the peninsula were carefully made. A fleet of galleys was fitted out with utmost circumspection, and manned with the brawny sons of the marshland on the easternmost fringe of the country by the coast, who could as readily wield an oar as a saber and a spear, or handle a bow and a sling. The land forces were also thoroughly equipped and lavishly provisioned, and divided into equal sections of five hundred charioteers and eight hundred foot troops, four hundred men of the infantry of each section forming a convoy for the provisions and the water.

When the army was ready for departure, the pharaoh had Aseneth brought out to the camp and besought her for a blessing. He had sent a hundred oxen and a hundred pounds of jewels ¹ as an offering of supplication to the temple at Anu before he had entered upon his campaign against the rebellious southern capital, and was much minded to make a public profession of his belief that he owed his victory to the prayers of the *diva*. But as such an acknowledgment would have detracted much of the glory of the victory from the arms of his elated warriors, he compromised on making a public exhibition of his religious sentiment in order to apologize to the God whom Aseneth served, for not giving Him His full meed of the honor due Him for His

¹ Rings of gold, or silver; a common appellation for "currency" in those times.

assistance, and to draw down His continued help and guidance.

The war promised from the beginning to be a stubborn, three-cornered conflict among the Arabs, the Midianites, and the Egyptians, each of these three parties being obliged to meet the other two at the same time. Thus only the advantages gained by the pharaoh were of practical value. If the Arabs pressed forward on one side and lodged on the conquered grounds, the Midianites were sure to settle down in their rear, and lock them in between themselves and their common foe. On the other hand, if the Midianites succeeded in forcing the pharaoh back, the Arabs would follow them up, and oblige them to decline to the one side or the other in order to avoid being crushed in the vise. But when the pharaoh made a concerted advance, both the Arabs and the Midianites declined battle, and retreated right and left into the fastnesses of their rugged mountains, whither the pharaoh was too wise to follow.

It was impossible to make the enemy stand their ground; nor could the Egyptians pass between them to take possession of the disputed region, with two armies in their rear, as likely as not to close in behind them and cut them off from their line of support from home. Nor was it feasible to divide the army and to attack the enemy separately, because then the Midianites would withdraw to their mountains, and the Arabs, in all probability, would retire into the fortresses of the mining region which the Egyptians themselves had constructed, and which they knew to be impregnable if well garrisoned and provisioned.

Had they, during the long period of peace in the past hundred years, maintained a strong force in that region, the mines should never have fallen into the hands

of their rivals. Apepi felt that the blame for losing the mines was ultimately to be laid to a neglectful administration of which he was the supreme head; hence, he himself was answerable to the country for the misfortune.

This consideration was stimulated by the casual remarks of his captains who, out of respect, spared the pharaoh's name, but who, out of chagrin at the slippery game, did not spare the pharaoh's government. They made the almighty "Right Leg" the scapegoat of their criticisms. He was the *factotum* of the king — captain of the royal bodyguard, overseer of the magazines, and chancellor of the kingdom. In fact, he was too much, they said, to amount to much; and Apepi then and there resolved to relieve Putiphar of some of his responsibilities on his return.

In the meantime the fleet had remained seemingly inactive. No report of its movements had reached headquarters. It was in charge of Hent-ha-nur, the governor of the second or southern Wall, who had at the departure of the pharaoh's forces been noticed to evince an unusual degree of respectful intimacy and affection for Aseneth. He had ascended her car of state by springing on one of its wheels at the close of her prayer over the pharaoh, and had caught her hand as it dropped after the benediction, and had fervently kissed it. At that ceremony of reverence, Aseneth had presented her cheek to him for another kiss; but he had reverently taken her head in both his hands, pressing down on both sides the hieratic veil of the *diva*, and had pressed a kiss on her brow.

The pharaoh had required an explanation of such sacrilegious and scandalous conduct. But Aseneth had instantly taken Hent-ha-nur's part, saying: "He was once a father to me when I was in need and distress."

At a council of the captains, it was decided to send orders to Hent-ha-nur to attack the city of Midian, and thus to force the one party of the enemy to retreat from the front. But before the orders could have been carried around the head of the promontory, the Arabs were seen to break camp in haste and confusion, and to evacuate the fortresses. Immediately also the Midianites began to move forward towards the deserted region of the mines.

But they had not had time to intrench themselves, when they were challenged by a detachment of the naval force which had pushed itself like a wedge between the retreating Arabs and the advancing hosts of Midian. Now the main body of the pharaoh's troops rushed upon them from the rear; being pressed from both sides, they were obliged to divide their force, and slowly to yield to the superior generalship of the pharaoh and of the crafty Hent-ha-nur.

The naval commander had sailed along the arm of the sea amid a pattering of light skirmishes with Midianite and Arabian flotillas which were no more fit for waging war than kitchen maids in cap and apron, and which were for the greater part entered and annexed to Hent-ha-nur's stately array of gallant craft. In the country of the eastern Arabs he effected a landing, burnt their camps both in the hills and in the plains, laid waste their fields, and destroyed their orchards. As fast as the news of this disaster to their homes was carried north to the conquerors of the peninsula, Hent-ha-nur withdrew, again sailed north, and intercepted the Midianites in time to prevent them from establishing themselves in the camp from which he had intentionally lured the Arabs.

Hent-ha-nur entered the city of Anu at the side of

the king in triumph. He had already received the appointment to the chancellorship in place of Putiphar, and now requested Apepi to grant him leave of absence for a few days so that he might pay his respects to his "daughter" Aseneth, "as it behooves me," he said, "that I should have her offer a prayer and a cloud of incense as a thankoffering for the exceeding favor of my lord the pharaoh!"

After the recovery of the territory of the mines, the pharaoh assiduously applied himself to restoring order and security in his realm. Thebes received a governor — who was neither formally accepted nor officially recognized by Ra-Seken, the deposed vassal king. Memphis was thoroughly cleansed from the nuisance of conspiracies and open profession of disaffection. The prisons were opened, and their material was sorted and sifted and disposed of according to the direction of the law. There was to be no more laggard indulgence and lax inspection and supervision in the departments of the judiciary and the military, but vigorous prosecution of malefactors and suppression of injustice and disorder of any description.

The various departments of the administration of the royal palace were reorganized under the direction of the new chancellor, who retained Putiphar in the office of the chief *Mer-Senuti*,¹ and who was most disagreeably surprised to discover Pent-Amen, the son of his old, esteemed, and much lamented friend P'tehebra, among the prisoners of the chancellor's dungeon. He conferred at length with Putiphar about the crime for which Pent-Amen was supposed to be suffering, and Putiphar not being able to establish a definite case except on the suspicious testimony and information

¹ Steward of the magazines.

of another criminal, Rahuel, the traitor of the battle of Bit Ka, Hent-ha-nur ordered Pent-Amen's release.

The case of Ai-defa, of whose guilt as a conspirator there was little doubt, and the case of Rahuel, whose name had already been denounced to the king, were put over until such time when the ordinary offenders should have been disposed of, and the hands of the officials should be free to delve deeper into those machinations which had brought about the rebellion of Thebes and had despoiled a large number of the best families of the land both of their positions and of their estates. Putiphar could not mistake the note of rigor and determination and threat in the announcement of the new "Right Leg"; for much of his own wealth was drawn from the well which Hent-ha-nur had promised to uncover and to sound to the bottom. Hence the deposed chancellor took counsel with his wife.

Nefer-hotep was so much wrought up over the reduction in rank of her awkward liege-lord, that at first she disdained to listen to his expositions of the manifold dangers that threatened both her and him from the zeal of the new incumbent of the high office. But Putiphar had recently noticed that Nefer-hotep was nursing a tender conscience about some offense against God which she rued bitterly, but ineffectively. He laid his finger upon that wound. It should make her unbosom herself. And once the stone was removed from her heart, it would be easy to enter therein.

"You have not been your own cheerful and pretty self of late," he said tentatively. "Your fair brow is darkened with the clouds of sorrow, and your sweet mouth is puckered with distress. Will you not repose your secret of suffering in my bosom?"

It was so good of him; it was too good of him, to be true, that he should be so effusive of sympathy and affection! She did not trust him to be sincere. She suspected a plot of his customary selfishness.

"It is no wonder that a neglected wife should be sad," she answered evasively. "You have stepped down and back from the face of glory low enough to make your bondmaids grieve!"

"But what we have lost in station, we have gained a hundredfold in wealth; and the good pharaoh may at any time again turn the face of his good-will upon his servant! A banquet, a birthday, or a feast at the temple may knock at his bosom, and reopen it for the enclosing of a faithful servant! You do not know the power of wine! By the way, sweet one! Might you not touch and turn towards me the heart of Pent-Amen through the heart of Binyah? The Hittite woman is too generous not to sprinkle a drop of her happiness upon my depressed soul!"

But Nefer-hotep was still waiting for him to touch upon that sore spot which was the source of her grief. He had missed it in his first attempt. She remained impassive. Pent-Amen might rejoice at his regained liberty, and Binyah might be happy. But she was not happy — and that was her trouble.

Again Putiphar cast out his bait.

"Let us go to the temple to offer a sacrifice to Neith in expiation of our sins!" he suggested, watching her closely; and he noticed that she was a little moved. "We may have offended the pure tenants of the sky, and we may need a cleansing with incense and holocaust!"

"Not to Neith," she replied, slowly melting, and sidling up to him confidentially, "but to Aseneth, at Anu! I have wronged Aseneth!"

"But you did not see her at the feast!"

"I did, but not at the temple. I saw her on the river after the feast. And Joseph saw her" — she was trembling from emotion, and Putiphar put up his ears — "and Joseph fell in love with her — he, you know, whom you have put in the dungeon."

"But he deserved severer punishment!"

"*But he did not*" she faltered, shyly burying her face in his ample bosom.

"Oh, — well!" That was all he said, and it was all that was necessary. He put both his arms about her, and drew her to himself with a warmth and strength that she had never experienced from the dolt who had always been preoccupied with the business of the king to the neglect of his domestic obligations.

"You will speak to Binyah?" he resumed.

"I will!" she simpered amid tears of a newly found joy. "And I will speak to Hent-ha-nur that he may also set Joseph free!"

"I would not advise you to do so. Hent-ha-nur is an honest man, but an uncouth warrior, who cannot long hold his place of chancellor — which is also that of private chamberlain to the "Double High House," whom may the gods protect! What would Hent-ha-nur do with a young man who is accused of so evil a crime? He would sift the matter to the bottom — and it might not please you! Content yourself until one of the fans of the windmill of fortune shall again touch us, and take us up, and carry us aloft in the favor of the king! Then we shall see that Joseph shall be delivered without the risk of compromising anyone — dear to me!"

Another affectionate squeeze, and Nefer-hotep went about her errand to Binyah.

A few days later, Pent-Amen was reinstated in his

position as the steward of the cup at the royal table. The soft-hearted Apepi sympathized heartily with the young man for his sufferings in the past, and, as a mark of the return of his full confidence, honored him with the bestowal of the royal signet. The pharaoh in secret deplored the loss of P'tehebra for which he held Rahuel responsible.

The denunciations made by Metabil and the other captains, of the disastrous first expedition to Sina, had in the meantime been corroborated both by the testimony of Ben-Eder who had been trapped by the Arabs, and also by the envoys of Saleph during the negotiations for peace and friendship subsequent to the second and successful war on the peninsula. Apepi had also received from the indefatigable Hent-ha-nur the written report of the inquiry into Pent-Amen's imprisonment, and had noted that the young man had been made the object of a persistent temptation and persecution from all those quarters where Rahuel had been active during the last seven years; from the stoneyards, the temple school, and Thebes, at different times coincident with Rahuel's presence at those places, and with his private and official activity.

The murders both of Neht-nefert and of Phares had been traced to him, and today Pent-Amen appeared with proof positive before the king, that Rahuel had also looted the tomb of his lamented sister. Binyah had discovered Neht-nefert's cincture on Zoroith, who candidly admitted that she had received it from Rahuel, and furnished an exact description of the outlandish colony and its immense store of stolen wealth across the sea. Binyah had been the host of Pent-Amen's sister the days before the feast of Aseneth, and well remembered the manner and kind of her dress, and

Pent-Amen recognized the cincture abstracted from Zoroith as that which he himself had had fashioned for his sister in Memphis for her birthday, which had occurred during her stay in his house.

Hence the evidence of Rahuel's direct connection with many misdeeds of the past was completely established. The pharaoh ordered an immediate trial at the Gate. Zoroith also was apprehended, but was freed through the convincing testimony of Pent-Amen, who fully understood the cause of her protracted grief.

Rahuel, on the other hand, was convicted (1) of instigating the Midianites to the destruction of the wells and cisterns of Sina; (2) of advising the Midianites to lure P'tehebra into the ambush of their impassable mountains; (3) of killing Neht-nefert, and (erroneously) of looting the tomb of his victim.

Each single count of these three was sufficient to draw down upon him the death sentence. But before the judges proceeded with the formal publishing of his condemnation, they appealed to the king for directions. Apepi consulted with his chiefs and Pent-Amen; and they, considering the enormity of Rahuel's wickedness, voted that the death penalty should be postponed for an aggravation of his penance, and that he should be marked in the interim with the wrath of the king for the detestation of his ferocity and to the horror of other malefactors.

"Then cut off his right hand on which he wears my signet!" the pharaoh decided.

These orders were borne to the Gate, and forthwith the executioners threw Rahuel on the ground, and placing a billet beneath his right hand, chopped it off at the wrist. The mutilated arm was steeped in boiling oil, bandaged and strapped, and Rahuel was returned

to the dungeon. He had not uttered a sound during the entire proceedings. But when they raised him up from the ground, he gnashed his teeth, and with an inarticulate, menacing snarl raised the stump of his arm towards heaven.

“He blasphemes!” one of the priests on the judges’ seat exclaimed horror-stricken; but the Nutri-Hon of the temple of P’tah raised up his hands with upturned palms, the ceremony of adoration, and devoutly prayed: “God on high laugheth to scorn the wiles of a fool; He maketh a fool of him who raiseth his head aloft into the clouds!”

Slunk between the pillars of the gate stood the slight figure of a young woman, who had grown white at sight of the cruel punishment of the murderer and traitor, as white as the hair that framed her youthful, sad face. She had with intense interest followed the judgment of Rahuel, and when the solemn-voiced Nutri-Hon had finished his invocation, she repeated his last words: “He maketh a fool of him who raiseth his head aloft into the clouds,” and added sadly: “But is there no justice in heaven for those whom the fool hath trodden under foot?”





Chapter Forty-sixth

A BROKEN HEART

IN consequence of the disclosures made by Zoroith to Pent-Amen, a band of experienced raiders were sent across the Nile to search for the "colony" of the Hebrews, to ransack their stores, confiscate their flocks, and to transfer the entire membership, men, women, and children, to Memphis, for examination and final disposition. The armed emissaries of Hent-ha-nur were provided with a small flotilla of flat-bottomed barges, and with sledges and two dozen hardy and gay donkeys. They had received a minute description of the cove where from the landing a path led through the wilderness to the site of the stationary camp of these semi-barbarous dwellers of the mountains of the coast, so that no time should be lost in locating the goal of their expedition, and no time should be given the colonists for decamping with at least part of their loot.

In the meantime, Ai-defa was presented before the High Gate. The defalcations which he had practised while in charge of the royal bakeries were listed, one and all, from his own accounts, by the scribes of Hent-ha-nur. He made no attempt to deny them; the testimony of his own figures was too plain to bear contradicting. Had he had an inkling of what Rahuel had in store for him when he followed his colleague to

the funeral of Neht-nefert, he could at least have destroyed some of his records which contained his monthly inventories and accountings and shortages, or he could have covered up the leakages with spurious accounts of expenditures for the royal board, which none but himself was in a position to control.

But he had felt himself so secure, that he had left his office in the state of confusion which he had recently created by meeting the demands of the Theban patriots for large contributions towards the revolutionary funds, in order to clear himself of the charge of disloyalty to the national cause lodged against him by Hakar. Had the cause of the rebels met with success, he would today be a free man, and probably one of the most influential officers of the newly-to-be-proclaimed king, Ra-Sekenen.

These things were plainly presented before the severe judges. There was not lacking a tittle of evidence to make him out an arch-conspirator and a traitor to the pharaoh. His abuse of a position of trust at the palace added weight to the charge, in so far as it was deemed the height of insolence for an official to negotiate for the downfall of his own gracious monarch. In accordance with his guilt he was sentenced to death; but in accordance both with his youth and the pleadings of Pent-Amen, and with his moderation in not putting away the pharaoh whom he had had occasion at any time to poison, he was granted the leniency of not having his hands and feet cut off. He was to die by the ax, and the sentence was to be executed before sundown of the day of his judgment.

Therefore, he was immediately stripped of his garments, and was vested with a long white robe, and while the judges proceeded with their business, the

executioners erected the gibbet in sight of the tribunal. Ai-defa was put under guard, and led away to a stall, or pen, where the condemned criminals were reserved for execution.

At the side of the pen he saw a small woman, also dressed in a long white gown with blue borders and a deep blue collar, crouching behind the gate. Her head was covered with a thick white veil, so that he could not see her face, just like the heads of women condemned to have their nose cut off for the crime of adultery. But this woman was neither within the pen nor under guard; hence, she was not one of those given over to the public hangman.

Ai-defa conceived an indefinable sympathy for the poor creature. He noticed that she trembled and shuddered slightly at his approach to the death chamber, and he fancied he heard a suppressed sob arising from her breast; at all events, he could not well mistake her grasping at her heart with both hands, whereby she twisted and bundled her outer robe over her breast as in a violent convulsion, and unknowingly bared her feet, and her nether coat. It was a pitiable sight. Her head fell forward over her breast, and on the veil appeared heavy teardrops.

At last, when he passed her, she rent her outer robe in two down to the hem, perhaps unconsciously, and uttered a loud and painful moan and gasp, as if she were fighting for breath. By the violent motion of her body her cloak was thrown wide open, and he recognized on her the cincture of his wife, which she had worn on her wedding day, and which she had discarded on that evil day when he would have brutally taken her life for a false suspicion, but for the intervention of Pent-Amen.

But he could not believe that it was his wife. He did not want to believe that it was the gentle, loving Arab girl that was kneeling there in the sand, torn asunder with grief over his cruel fate. She could not have loved him so long; she could not love him so dearly! He had learned that he was not her first lover; that she had craved the love of the brutal Rahuel long ere she had dared to raise her eyes to him. She had been free these last three years to indulge her craving, and she had been solicited in the most passionate manner to bestow her favor on her first idol — how could Zoroith have remained loyal and loving!

Just to convince himself of the truth of his opinion concerning the fickleness of women, and to dispel the avid remorse for having once trampled on a heart of pure gold, he requested of one of the guards, as a last favor, to ask the woman her name.

After Ai-defa's feet were secured in the stocks, the man went out and roughly asked the desired question. But she only lifted her veil, and the knave fell back. He had seen a face so full of grief and suffering, of terror and tenderness, and of such unnatural beauty, that, on his return to the prisoner, his tongue failed him. He beat the air with his hands, chewed his tongue, and rolled his eyes in a vain effort of describing his feelings.

After some minutes of hopping about like a stunned hen and cackling rather than uttering human speech, he contrived at last to stammer and stutter that he would never again ask her, no, not for a kingdom! "Such a woman needs no name," he splashed and sputtered. "She is white, but young; broken down, but animated with the activity of a shadow on the rilling waters. She is dying, but with the courage of the hind fighting for her mate! Ai-defa, if she is your

wife, your soul will never be redeemed before the face of Horus. No, not a thousand golden beetles of the size of your head will redeem your soul before the face of Horus!"¹

Ai-defa would hear no more. He knew who the woman was, the only woman to suffer in advance, for love of him, the agony of his own death.

The following night, the first boat-load of the loot of the colony arrived at Memphis, together with Samma who had been picked up among the colonists, and with Omri and Zambri. The women and children were left in charge of the other half of the band of raiders to be transferred with the rest of the treasures. The many bundles and caskets taken from the caves were strapped on the backs of donkeys, and were now being conveyed into the city to be deposited in the magazines of Hent-ha-nur.

The train passed the gallows at the gate. It was rather dark and lonesome, and the malicious cawing of some belated crows flitting about over the heads of the victims of justice added to the dreariness and ghastliness of the scene. The donkeys laid back their restless ears in affectation of modesty and gentleness, as if inspired by a wholesome fear of the punishment they deserved for their customary waywardness, and again pricked up their ears and flirted their tails and kicked up their heels only after they had entered the street on the safe side of the gate. The soldiers passed silently, and Omri and Zambri looked away from the place of the gibbets.

¹ The *Beetle* (*scarabæus*), of stone or any other heavy material, was placed in the breast of the dead instead of the heart which was removed, and was supposed by its weight to supply any deficiency of virtue.

But Samma, who was not so ill at ease, because he felt himself innocent of wrong-doing, surveyed the ghastly scene with some curiosity. He was not bound like his brethren. He moved away from the company, and following an impulse of natural inquisitiveness, stalked warily towards the tallest of the gibbets, that on which Ai-defa's head and body were suspended. Beneath each of the gallows were piled up the last earthly belongings of the delinquents, that is, their clothing and shoes, their last traveling habit having been charitably furnished by the state. Their relatives were allowed to take these things away with the bodies, unless a victim was executed for a crime against the commonwealth, or against the sacred person of the king, in which case the clothing might be removed, but the body had to remain to be made the food of the ravens and vultures, and a warning to other plotters against the public peace and welfare.

Under the gibbet of Ai-defa, Samma had noticed an extraordinarily large heap of clothing, and, on top, a white garment with blue hemmings. Being well acquainted with the customs of the Egyptians, he recognized it as the distinctive garment of mourning, and was curious to see who would sit beneath the gallows at night. But as he approached the heap of cloths, and snapped his fingers to draw the attention of the lone mourner, and then stopped half-heartedly, and cried: "Shoo there, shoo there!" waving his arms, there was neither stir, nor other sign of life. "Well," he said contentedly, "if you are dead, you will not bite," and advanced courageously.

"Is it a woman," he wondered, "a woman, this pile of rags!" Then he stooped and disentangled the heavy veiling to uncover the face. He stooped low,

his face almost touching the face of the woman, and instantly recoiled in terror. "Ah me!" he wailed. Then he ventured another close look. "Ay, to a certainty!" he exclaimed. "Poor worm!" And he looked up inquiringly on the gallows, straining his eyes. "It is not Rahuel," he lamented. "It would be fit that Rahuel should be hanged over your head, poor girl!"

Before he was pulled away by one of the band, he stooped down again, and saw that the hands of the dead woman were clutched over her heart. "Yea," he mused, "it is the spot where it hurt you most. It is a pity that so good a heart should be broken for a rogue!"

"Who is it?" the soldier demanded.

"Zoroith, the pretty!" Samma sighed, and pensively followed the guard into the dark city.





Chapter Forty-seventh

AWAKENING

PUTIPHAR and Nefer-hotep had made their pilgrimage to Anu, as they had vowed, and had even obtained an interview with Ase-neth, in which Nefer-hotep narrated the story of the misfortunes of Joseph and of Rahuel, cunningly concealing, however, what part she herself had played in the ruin of her erstwhile steward. Ase-neth was found to be more easily accessible now than she had been several years before, owing to her own incessant clamoring against the homage bestowed upon her by the superstitious populace, and also to the revulsion of the popular religious sentiment from the idolatrous polytheism to the more reasonable worship of one sole god, as the king had decreed. For although this one sole god was still adored under the symbol of the sun, and under the name of Ra, or Amen-Ra, yet the conviction had gained universal vogue, that God was God whether He were called Ra, Ammon, or Amen-Ra, or any other divine name.

The one feature lacking in the apprehension of the true monotheistic idea was that the priests themselves, and the king, did not suspect a contradiction in bestowing the distinctively divine attributes on as many inherited local deities as were conceived to be presiding over the fortunes of individual cities. They did not

realize that the divine attributes as such are incommunicable, and thus, although feeling the compelling power of truth as by instinct, they still in practise persisted in the ways of their ancient confusion.

There was at hand, demanding recognition, such a maze of distorted traditions of Adam, of Noah, of the wife and the sons of Noah, of paradise and its disastrous fall, and of the flood as the basis of a new creation, that it would have required a more generous light to lead the way out of the labyrinth than the complacent and comfortable hierarchy felt it a duty to supply. In Egypt, religion lacked a living center. "Every man was diverted into his own way." The government had a responsible head as the guardian of the law, without whose vigilance, justice and order would be at the mercy of the bold and violent; but also religion must have a teacher without reproach, lest the irreverent, the untrained, and the proud put themselves in the place of God, and the lucubrations of their own passionate egotism, in the place of God's teaching. But for priests, in order to do full justice to their office, it would be necessary that they be gods. Chastity may place them next to the angels — but chastity was not in vogue among the heathen.

Aseneth was deeply grieved at the recital of Joseph's misfortune. She barely remembered him from their brief dwelling together in their infancy, she said, but she thought she had recognized him on that morning of the third day after the festivities of Anu — she disdaining to emphasize that those festivities were celebrated in honor of herself — when she sailed close to Nefer-hotep's bark on the canal. Nefer-hotep turned crimson at the innocent reference to that secret excursion of hers, of which Putiphar had not yet heard

a word. But she reclined her head on Putiphar's shoulder, and concealed her face from him. Aseneth noticed her blushing, but from untainted ingenuousness ascribed it to the pleasure of a sweet reminiscence connected with the much coddled Putiphar who, even in her presence, allowed his fond wife to creep into his breast as the hen allows her chicks to creep into her feathers.

Nefer-hotep, womanlike, soon lost interest in the serious talk between her recovered lord and the elfish girl, and diverted herself by subjecting Aseneth to a minute inspection. The hieratic vestments looked most seemly on the beautiful figure, she thought, and the broad-linked golden necklace which was displayed over the breast of the neat young priestess was worth a good deal of money. Those clear brown eyes were enviably candid, that straight, transparent nose was distinctively noble, and those narrow, tightly closing lips with just a dot of ruby touched on the curves of each side of the dip of the upper lip, and a delicate dot on the nether lip, to produce the shape of a heart on the mouth, were decidedly appetizing.

Nefer-hotep's scrutiny of the fair maiden was not envious, but yet close, analytical, and comparative. But why should so distinguished a favorite of the gods not be different from other women; different by a generous enhancement of the natural gifts of woman-kind? Nefer-hotep had never been tempted to envy the goddess Hathor for her exceptional beauty. If Nefer-hotep were married to Ra, or to the Hor-em-chu, she should surely also be dowered with godly gifts of resplendent, unearthly beauty. But she would rather content herself with her goodly measure of prettiness

which sufficed to cover her needs of happiness, than crave the solemn, ethereal beauty of a cold and loveless heaven! That the breast of Aseneth could harbor a heart for loving, never entered the mind of Nefer-hotep; for, was it not marked with the *Ankh*, the symbol of the immortality, and, hence, also of the unfleshliness of the gods?

She pointed to the pretty pendant in the middle of the chain that dangled over Aseneth's breast, and asked whether she never felt the burden of being alone. "No," Aseneth replied with an indulgent smile, "for I am not alone." And then she parted her robe beneath the throat, and showed her a counterpart of the *Ankh* imprinted on her own breast. "God is with me, always," said she.

"But it is a cold love, the love of a god?"¹ Nefer-hotep queried doubtfully.

"It is warm enough to burn the heart, and sweet enough to transport the soul, and to make it oblivious of the fleeting, shadowy pleasures of the flesh!"

"Joseph was wont to speak thus of his love!" — Nefer-hotep — you are forgetting yourself!

"Take my love to Joseph!"

"Is he your god?" Nefer-hotep exclaimed, with a temptation to add frivolously: "Then you are cheating the gods for their noble gifts."

But Aseneth ignored the testy tone of her taunting, and replied softly: "Joseph loves the God whom also I adore, and our love is one in the same love of God!"

Now that Nefer-hotep had a message to carry, she pressed Putiphar to make himself ready for their return to Memphis.

¹ *Neith*, the spouse of Ra, and the mother of the gods, was named a *virgin* in Egyptian mythology.

Rahuel had not been long in the dungeon before Joseph extended to him his solicitude. Joseph was free to move about at will within the confines of the spacious prison. He had not only submissively, but also cheerfully, borne his hard lot, and had never given his jailers reason for complaint. Neither had he swerved from his habits of piety. He had turned the mind of many a hardened and despairing criminal towards God, the true God, whose image he uncovered beneath the superstitious rubbish of the idolatry which his clients rather practised than embraced. Many a candidate for the ax or the gallows had gone forth from the prison to meet his doom with resignation, if not also with a bright hope of gaining the mercy and forgiveness of his Maker, kindled within his crushed heart by the cheering assurance that he was to meet a God who gloried in the infinity of His fatherly love.

But with Rahuel, Joseph's most devoted labors were in vain. At the end of every exhortation to be resigned, to bear his punishment as a penance, to forgive his enemies, Rahuel remained dumb, and for an answer held up his mutilated arm to Joseph's eyes. For two long years Joseph had patiently labored to impress Rahuel with the justice of his punishment in order to lead him by degrees to repentance. He had promised him that he would intercede for him with Hent-ha-nur, if he only would honestly be converted from his godless hatred and despair. He had assisted Pent-Amen in regaining his liberty.

"But you have also assisted Ai-defa to a rise from which he shall not return," Rahuel retorted with bitter scorn. "And there will be my end where Ai-defa finished — among the flocks of crows and ravens that will eat each other in contending for my eyes! I want

justice from God ere I mend! I cannot bear this fearful injury to my person from heathen hounds, and cower, myself a dog, beneath the lash of God! I had bargained with God for revenge, a just revenge, for deathly insult; and revenge hath turned and swallowed me up, and hath eaten up a life full of the promises of love and happiness! I must be vindicated ere I pray to God!"

It was a signal of a coming change, that he at all condescended to speak. He had been brooding in silence, consuming himself with his fury. Now he had at least removed the bandage from his wound, and thus had given the experienced and sympathetic physician an opportunity of applying his art.

"Cain also thought he had a just grievance against his well-favored brother," Joseph suggested. "Had Cain been humble, and honest with himself, he would not have had cause to nourish a deadly jealousy. Cain was marked for the murder of his brother; and you are marked for many misdeeds which have resulted in the slaughter of many! You cannot contend against God! Own your guilt, and petition God for mercy, and you shall at least escape the everlasting torments of the damned!"

Rahuel looked down at his stump of an arm.

"Never!" he faltered. But his characteristic self-confidence had left him. He had said "never" from habit; but he had said it so cautiously that it was evident he was troubled over having said it. The everlasting torments of the damned appealed to his disordered fancy. What may hell be like, if this confinement beneath an open roof seemed like hell?

From that day forward, Rahuel made visible and persistent efforts to conquer his rebellious spirit. He

stopped railing against God, at least outwardly, and in the course of many weary months of captivity following that decisive conflict with Joseph, he seemed to enter ever deeper into himself, and to become persuaded of the error of his ways. He had heard through Joseph of the death of Zoroith under the gibbet of Ai-defa, and his heart had quaked at the sad news of the end of a life than which he could not fancy a nobler. The last prop on which he had sustained his desire for liberty and independence had given way; life held out to him no more inducements for continuing the mad struggle of his pride against the decrees of divine Justice. And Joseph was to be the first to whom he would announce his reawakening to a sense of humanity.

One day the ancient capital stood agog at news such as had not been heard from the days of its foundation. The pharaoh had been troubled with a mysterious vision. All the soothsayers of the kingdom, and the priests from the principal temples of the land, together with the learned masters of the schools, had been called together to interpret the dreams of the troubled pharaoh.

Also P'hoteptra and his gifted daughter had been commanded to appear before the king, and had, therefore, come up from Anu, taking residence in the house of the Nutri-Hon of Memphis. Here, Pent-Amen often visited with Binyah during his hours of leisure for the purpose of consulting the ancient books of chronicles collected in the library of the temple of P'tah. He had learned in prison from the lips of Joseph so many strange legends of the dealings of God with men in olden times, that he had cast off the superstitions of the worship of many gods, and had determined within himself to seek out from the traditions of his own people whatever might accord with the traditions of the

Hebrews. These, he was convinced, were free from all grotesque and unseemly interpolations, and, hence, must also be more correct in narrating the wonderful events and promises which the Egyptians were treasuring in the guise of the legends of Osiris, Isis, and the mystical Hor-em-chu.

Here also he often came in contact with Aseneth who freely entertained him with recitals of the story of her native land as wonderful, as simple, and as congenial as the tales of Joseph. To her he confided that Joseph had interpreted a dream for himself and for his former, unfortunate colleague Ai-defa.

"Why do you not tell the pharaoh of Joseph's gift of interpretation?" she chided him.

Why did he not? Why had he not? He could make no excuse, and proffer no explanation. He had neglected an office of gratitude which he owed to Joseph; this was the only explanation of his neglect of the pharaoh's present, pressing needs.

"I shall tell the pharaoh today!" he assured his earnest monitor; and he did tell the pharaoh of Joseph that day.

Nefer-hotep had before this juncture of events faithfully delivered Aseneth's message of love to Joseph. She had also endeavored to garnish her report of Aseneth's beauty and affection just a little, but had felt that, try as she would, she had with every new attempt failed to do justice to the impressions she had received of the fair priestess, as well as to the real merit of Aseneth's superior, unearthly, but none the less enviable loveliness. And Joseph was gratified to note the zeal with which the slippery Nefer-hotep was making amends for the injury she had once done to him and to his honor, and the joy with which she was

bubbling over for having at last aroused her liege-lord to a sense of his domestic obligations.

Joseph was delivered from prison, and interpreted the dreams of the pharaoh without hesitation, after the whole college of secret wisdom, as represented by the native "prophets," magicians and scribes, had made a signal failure of their diffident attempts of that singular problem. The pythonic statue of *Khonsu*, the "Giver of Oracles,"¹ had the doubtful honor of first place among the disappointed "prophets" of the pharaoh.

Joseph was most magnificently rewarded. Apepi made him "the first after himself" in the kingdom, and assigned to his use the "second car" of the pharaoh. He bestowed upon him royal raiment, a golden neck-chain, and his own signet ring, and appointed him viceroy of Both Egypts. "Go to Joseph!" he directed those that thereafter sought favors of him.

But the greatest joy of Joseph was the winning of the hand of Aseneth. The pharaoh himself did not disdain to be instrumental in bringing about the union of the beautiful and happy pair. And then and there, when the pharaoh seemed inexhaustible of generosity, Joseph pleaded for Rahuel's pardon.

On the day of his exaltation, Joseph was not too proud to visit his wretched countryman in prison, and to announce to him that by the grace of the pharaoh he was a free man. Aseneth would not but be witness to the bestowing of liberty upon the man who had deserved everlasting bondage for his exceeding measure of wickedness, but who had been turned by the unceasing kindness of Joseph from his evil ways. So Joseph had been obliged to take her with him into the guardhouse of Putiphar's prison.

¹ Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt*, Vol. I, 174.

On their arrival, they had met Samma. Nobody seemed to know what to do with him. He was not guilty of any particular offense punishable by law, and at the same time was himself not certain of any particular reason why he should be at liberty, as he had no purpose in life but to enjoy himself. So Hent-ha-nur had sent him to the guardhouse, merely to have him out of the way when his two tribesmen Omri and Zambri were to be put on trial for complicity with Nathan in his innumerable thefts and other dishonest transactions.

Samma went into ecstasies over the ravishing, radiant beauty of Aseneth. "If I knew that I could win so fine a girl," he exclaimed, "I should be willing to go to prison this moment, and also spend seven years in waiting for such a day of joy!"

But Rahuel, when he was brought forward, and beheld Joseph and Aseneth, exalted beyond heights of honor and power after which his own ambition, insatiable though it had been, would never have been bold enough to reach out, and the bare shadow and semblance of which would have made him dizzy with happiness—realizing suddenly the greatness of his loss through foolish pride, and dazzled by the shimmer of bliss and beauty of the royal pair, he cried out, earnestly and humbly:

"Verily, God hath made a fool of me!"





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